THE BOY LINCOLN

W. O. Stoddard

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THE BOY LINCOLN

"Hold onto him, Abe!"

The
BOY LINCOLN

BY

WILLIAM O. STODDARD

AUTHOR OF "THE WINDFALL," "THE RED PATRIOT,"
"THE SPY OF YORKTOWN," "THE FIGHT
FOR THE VALLEY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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PREFACE

THERE is a wonderful romance in the early life of Abraham Lincoln. It is worth anybody's while to study the beginnings of such a career and examine the first steps made toward the greatness which was to come. Only a few months before I became acquainted with him, I was living in just such a log house as he built for his father in Illinois and but a few miles north of it. Both were larger and better than the cabin in the Indiana backwoods, but each had just such a puncheon floor as Abe's step-mother made Tom Lincoln put down on her arrival. There were ten miles of open prairie between me and the nearest fenced settlement, and all the Embarrass River timber near at hand contained but one Yankee. The other settlers were all from Kentucky, southern Indiana and Ohio, altogether such neighbors as were his own around Gentryville. With all features of their character and life I became so familiar that it sometimes seems as if I had lived where he did.

I wish that those who may read this story might understand him better and then read on through the grand history of his life till they know why those

who were associated with him obtained such exalted ideas of him. During the years of my experience with him in the White House, it seemed to me as if his tall form grew taller all the while; and now, as I look back through the mists of memory and a half century of time, to our first meeting in my editorial room, he appears gigantic and I almost doubt if he ever did really get into so small a place and sit down with me to discuss our county politics.

I have carefully avoided bringing into this narrative imaginary places or occurrences or individuals, and if old man Sansom is to be called an exception to the rule, it may be replied that no man can live long on the frontier or in the backwoods without meeting his counterpart and hearing him say, "I knowed a man, once——"

There is here a lesson of possible development, advancement, uplifting, which is invaluable. It is peculiarly American and should become familiar to every boy or girl in the Republic for which he did and suffered so much and so unselfishly. Therefore I am going to send out my little book and ask them to go into the Indiana clearing with me and hear Abe talk with old man Sansom and listen to the debates of the parliament that held its important sessions in Gentry's grocery.

William O. Stoddard.

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THE BOY LINCOLN

CHAPTER I

THE NEIGHBORS

THERE were about thirty acres of land upon which there were no trees. All around this patch the forest was unbroken. On the southerly side were many stumps to tell of ax work, and the remainder was one of the natural "opens" which are always so eagerly sought for by frontiersmen, because it is as if there was just so much weary chopping already done and the stumps pulled out. In among the stumps, but not at all concealed, were two rude structures made of untrimmed logs. One of these was only a long, low shed, with a front composed of poles and slabs of bark. This was what some of the Western people called a "half-faced camp," and others a "pole

shelter." The other building was a well-made log house, about twenty feet by thirty, with a split-shingle roof. On the farther side of it was a huge chimney, made of sticks and tempered clay, but as yet, that frosty morning, no smoke from its blackened nose was rising above the roof-peak. Opposite the chimney and in the middle of the house-front there was a doorway, and on either side of this were wide, square holes for windows, but these had in them neither sash nor glass.

Just as a faint glimmer of coming light began to grow among the eastern tree tops, a framework of planks inside the doorway swung slowly back, and beyond this the sound of shrill young voices was heard, cheerily answering one another. It had required the strength of two young borderers to lift and swing back that door, and one of them stepped quickly out and glanced in all directions around him. If he were only ten, he was a tall boy for his age, and somewhat slender. His dark, bushy hair was partly hidden by a brimless coonskin cap, which seemed to add something or other to the expression of merry good-humor upon his sun-

burned face. As to the rest of his outfit, he did not appear to have anything on him which had not originally been part of the wearing apparel of some luckless deer. However well his buckskin shirt and leggings had been constructed by a backwoods tailor, they were now a good deal the worse for wear. As to warmth and comfort, they would have been well enough at some other season of the year, but were hardly the thing for frosty weather. The moccasins on his feet came half-way up the ankles, and seemed to be made of pretty thick deer leather.

"Hard frost, Dennis," he said. "It a'most looks as if thar had been a fall o' snow. Reckon deer 'd leave a good trail, this mornin'."

"It wouldn't do us any good if they did," replied Dennis, from beyond the doorway. "Wish we had a gun!"

"Abe! Abe!" called out a girl's voice from within, "what we want first is a bucket of water. Don't let's poke up the fire till we git one."

"All right," said Abe. "The bucket's right here by the door. Come on."

Dennis was no taller than Abe, but he was

broader shouldered and may have been older. The third member of that household to come out in sight was not more than twelve years old. She was a great deal better-looking than either of the others, without being at all better dressed; that is, her moccasins were in fair condition, but her woolen frock was in need of darning in several places. Her head was bare, and her rippling brown hair fell down over her shoulders.

When Abe had picked up his bucket and the three walked away together, the house behind them was all alone.

The land, upon which there were no trees, including that upon which there were stumps, lay in low ridges which told of the plow. At regular intervals along the ridges the white carpet of frost was pierced by the stiff-looking yellow stumps which are left behind by the corn-cutter. There were no other signs of any cropping on that small farm.

The three were following a well-trodden pathway. It led away to the eastward, almost into the forest. Not quite, for here at its edge was a long,

narrow level, the face of which looked as if a great pane of polished glass, with ragged borders, were gloomily waiting for the sunlight to come over the tree tops and enable it and its neighboring frost-faces to glimmer and smile. There was no spring here, for no rivulet flowed away from the pool, but much rain-water had drained into this hollow and it had become a natural cistern, such as was needed by people who had no other and had digged no well.

The young people halted at the edge of the ice, and Abe put down his bucket to take another long look around him and to remark:

"I say, Sis, don't you be skeered. But didn't old man Sansom tell how the redskins used to come an' watch at sech places as this? They'd skulk in bushes, like them over yonder, an' draw a bead on you while you were fillin' your bucket. Then they'd come 'round an' take your skelp an' git away with it. Ain't you glad they're gone?"

"Oo-oogh!" shuddered Sis. "I wish he wouldn't tell any more awful stories. But our folks killed 'em off for it, anyway."

"So they did," almost whispered back Abe. "But, Nancy, keep still! You an' Dennis, both. Look yonder—'cross the pool—'mong the sumacs!"

There was a dense growth of bushes on the farther margin of the sheet of ice. Away out over them stretched the leafless branches of the giant oaks, with a protective expression, although no sumac-bush was ever the child of any oak. The previous summer had been one of prosperity for that copse. The red "bobs" were numerous, and the frost had brought out all their brilliancy of color, while it had not lessened the yellow tints of such remnants of foliage as still clung to the wide arms of the forest monarchs.

"Hush-sh!" whispered Nancy. "I see 'em! Keep still, Denny!"

There were three faces which were almost out from the cover of the bushes; three forms which were as motionless as those of Nancy herself and her two companions. That was only for a moment, and then they gently nudged one another, as if they were pointing across the ice and saying something about the water-carriers from the log house. One

of them, in the middle, was a very handsome fellow, and he was large for one of his family, although his antlers told for him that he was only five years old. Once more he stood still, while the two does on either side of him drew closer till they touched him, as if to remind him that he was their protector, in case there might be any danger to them in the three other wild creatures at whom they were staring.

"Buck an' two does," muttered Abe. "Don't I wish I had a rifle! But father took his with him, all the way to Kentucky. Good short range."

"Oh, don't kill 'em!" said Nancy; "they're too pretty."

"Can't!" grumbled Abe. "But I could, if I had a gun."

"Don't believe you could hit 'em," said Dennis doubtfully.

The buck stood quite fearlessly, and may have been under the impression that he had not been seen. No one could have told him that the family rifle had just then gone visiting. The fact is that as to deer and their perceptions concerning hunters

there is no authentic record. They will sometimes expose themselves recklessly without any apparent reason. Other animals are strangely careless at times. It has been declared by a multitude of intelligent farmers that the crow alone will never allow a man with a gun to come anywhere near him. If, indeed, the man will lay down his gun and walk away from it, or if he has accidentally left his ammunition at home, the dark-winged corn-stealer will be more neighborly. There have been endless arguments as to the manner in which he determines the precise range of any shotgun, and whether or not it is loaded.

The buck and his companions continued to look on in silence, while Abe broke the thin ice with a stick and filled his rude bucket with water. So little did they appear to be alarmed, in fact, that one of the does began to nibble at a sumac bob, and the other went back a step or two and picked at the red berries of a mountain-ash. Abe put down his bucket to watch them, and remarked:

"I've heard tell about that. It's one way the deer git thar livin', all winter long. They'll eat

twigs, too, an' they'll scratch away the snow from any place whar thar's a bunch o' grass under it."

"Why," objected Nancy, "they couldn't see the grass."

"Yes, they can," said Abe, "right through the snow. An' father says a buck'll stand an' keep watch while the does eat up the fodder."

"But how does he git his own dinner?" asked Nancy.

"Oh," replied Abe, with a chuckle, "he says the old coon's only playin' sharp. He watches, an' then he goes round an' scoops all the rest o' the grass the does have been uncoverin' for him. They'll scratch the snow in a dozen places. Saves him heaps o' work."

There was hardly any wind blowing. There rarely is, near the roots of the trees in a great forest, whatever gusts may be driving overhead. In the summer-time, when the foliage is thick, one may often lie on the ground in an almost undisturbed stillness, unless a hurricane should upset a heavy trunk upon him. Nevertheless the air was bracing, and the young water-carriers were quite willing to

pick up their bucket and walk off with it toward the house. Nancy lingered for one more glance at the pretty brown faces among the sumacs, but at that moment the buck tossed his antlered head and the does wheeled gracefully to spring away with him into the forest. They had seen enough for one morning, and it might be best for them to go and break the ice in some other pool. At least they had no fires to build, if their breakfasts were yet to come, and that was what their human neighbors were now thinking of.

"If we'd only jest set it goin'!" said Nancy regretfully.

"Never mind," replied Abe; "I reckon it'll come up, quick enough. We covered heaps o' red coals last evenin'."

There was an important feature of border housekeeping hidden in that statement concerning fire that was smothered under a heap of ashes. Not in all that forest, down to the Ohio River, sixteen miles away southerly, nor beyond it, could there have been found one box of good lucifer matches that morning. As for going northward

after one, there were no settlements of any importance between that small clearing and the shores of the great lakes. All was a wilderness, into which matches had not yet intruded, for the entire new State contained not more than a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants. In every cabin, therefore, the fire when once kindled had to be kept up perpetually, like the Sacred Fire of the Six Nations in their Council-house among the Onondagas. Wise men have studied and written concerning the origin and meaning of that mystic and wonderful Sacred Fire, not thinking deeply enough to put themselves in mind of how many other fires, in how many wigwams, were from day to day, year to year, continually kindled from that central blaze. It was but a sort of National Treasury of carefully preserved combustion.

The heap of ashes on the hearth in the log cabin had a cold look on its face when the children came in. Abe and Dennis put down the bucket inside the door, but Nancy darted ahead of them and began very gently to shave away ashes from the top of the heap.

"Hold on!" said Abe. "I'll fetch in some birch bark; hickory, too. We'll have a fire, soon enough. Don't blow it till I come."

Out he went, and it was but a few steps to a liberal wood-pile, on one side of which lay a heap of bark and small branches. Dennis had followed him for an armful of larger wood, and in less than a minute they also were stooping over the ashes. More were scraped away, and Abe exclaimed:

"It's kept first-rate. Look at those coals! It'll come up."

There they were, plenty of them, and as their gray blanket was removed, so that they could obtain a breath of the morning air, they all woke up, with red and healthy faces. Nancy blew them hard, and more color came into their cheeks and her own. Some of them even sent out angry sparkles, as if they resented being disturbed from their quiet slumbers. The bits of dry bark were deftly laid in place, and now there was no need for any more blowing, so speedily did the yellow flames dance upward. More bark went on, some small branches, and then Abe sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Thar! That'll do. Nancy, you stir up the pone, while he an' I go for a back-log. You'd better let me cut the bacon."

"I'll do that," said Dennis. "I can cut it better'n you can."

"No, you can't," said Abe; "you always cut it too thick."

Out they went to the wood-pile, and here there was a selection to be made, on consultation. They agreed, and the cut of oak which was to serve as a backlog for the fire was one which had been chopped off by stronger hands than theirs. It was a bit of fuel which was to be rolled to its place rather than carried. It was easy enough to get it in front of the fireplace and take away the andirons, but then there still remained a kind of problem in log-house engineering as to the manner in which so heavy a weight was to be put away back without crushing out the very life of that now joyous and healthy fire. Both of the boys, however, had seen that thing done, for they now brought out of a corner a couple of short, strong poles, which they skilfully employed as levers. Under the log

went the poles, and then both skill and strength went into one long, hard-breathing lift.

"Thar she goes!" shouted Abe. "That'll burn all day an' all night. Now we'll put in the irons and go for a forestick."

Whack up against the backlog went the andirons, and, shortly, in came a smaller cut which was still heavy enough to require prying with the levers. Here was therefore a good foundation, and all sorts of smaller firewood might be heaped upon it at pleasure. At the same time all the coals which remained, with others which were rapidly making, were carefully poked out to the front, for it was getting hungrily near breakfast-time, and the cabin cookery was yet to be done. Part of it had already begun, for Nancy had climbed upon a table in a corner to bring down a large earthenware bowl, and into this, with an iron spoon, she had ladled a quantity of Indian corn-meal from a bag under the table. This itself consisted of four forked stakes driven into the ground, crosspieces on the stakes, and on these three sawed planks, all unplaned. Into the meal Nancy had sifted a little salt, she had

poured on water from the bucket, she had stirred vigorously, and now the pone was standing to soak until its time should come for further treatment. Against the wall near the table hung several flitches of bacon, a good-looking ham and a shoulder; and Abe, with Dennis watching him, was now at work with a butcher-knife cutting long slices from one of the flitches. He made the slices thin, but liberal, for he knew about what might be done with them by himself and his two assistants.

The bed of coals was now a good one, and on it Dennis had placed a long-handled sheet-iron saucepan, which heated so quickly that the fragrant pork began to hiss and sizzle the moment the slices were laid down. The whole house took on a different air, one of comfort, as soon as that smoke began to rise and float around. Any part of it which might choose to do so was free to go out at the door, for none of them had thought of closing it. The windows were still closed by wooden shutters, which hung from leather strap hinges above and were secured at the bottoms by leather catches, so that no midnight burglar could break in—not with-

out a shove strong enough to break that deerskin. All the light in the room came in at the door, but there was enough of it, for the sun was now well up, and his pleasant rays were shining brightly among the tops of the forest trees, to tell of the coming day. It would be a good while before he could climb high enough to shine down upon the ice of the pool, or to look in at the hole in the front of the cabin.

The fire was now going so well that it was warm work to stand near enough to turn the bacon so it would be done on both sides. At last it was cooked finely and was spooned off, so that its place in the saucepan might be taken by spats of corn pone, deftly sleighted in by Nancy, with one hand shielding her pretty face from the fire. She was not dark and sallow, like her brother Abe. There were roses in her cheeks, and there was a perpetual laugh lurking away back in her bright blue eyes.

There were other plates to which the cakes and bacon might be carried, but there was no breakfast-table in that house. Instead of one, there was an affair which may have been planned for a frontier

sofa, but which would do to lay plates on. A very wide slab of black walnut had been smoothed on its flat side. Into its other side auger-holes had been bored to receive crooked wooden legs, of nearly but not quite the same lengths, and the table, or sofa, had received no further improvements. At all events, it was not likely to break down, and the three housekeepers were soon gathered around it. The fact was that almost precisely such a morning meal was at that hour being prepared in thousands of frontier houses, and eaten without butter, sugar, or milk.

CHAPTER II

GREAT COMFORT

THE fire was dancing merrily, and more sticks had been put on, for the one luxury which was almost unstinted at that homestead was first-rate firewood. The room was warm, and there was even light enough, although the shutters over the window-holes had not been lifted. Breakfast was over and Nancy was clearing away the dishes. Two of the plates were of pewter, and another was of earthenware. There were also glimpses of shining tin upon the shelf, and there was a big, sheet-iron "Dutch oven" in a corner. The floor looked as if a little sweeping would do it no harm, but it did not get any. It consisted of pounded clay, which had been hardened by time and by the treading of many feet until it was as hard as "adobe," if not quite so smooth. The chairs upon which the children had been seated

were three-legged stools, which were strong enough to uphold the heaviest person. When a log of wood is split through lengthwise and the faces of the halves are trimmed flat, they become "puncheons," and are available for a variety of purposes. The tables and chairs in this house were all made from puncheons.

"Come on, Denny," said Abe; "it's time for you an' me to go an' feed the shoats. Jest hear 'em squeal!"

"Reckon I heard 'em callin' for corn," replied Dennis; "but they can go down to the pool an' root for their own water."

"They don't care to wallow in it in winter-time, anyhow," said Abe. "Father says he'll have it railed in before spring. Then the shoats'll have to go all the way to the other pool."

"That's what we may have to do, if this one dries up," said Nancy, "but I do jest hope it won't. What we need is a spring or a well."

The time for that clearing to own so great an improvement as a deep hole in the earth, with a windlass and a bucket, had evidently not yet come,

and the nearest running water was almost a mile from the house.

Abe and Dennis set out at once in the direction of the impatient summons which was now sounding incessantly. It came from away at the left, in the edge of the woods, and the path to it carried them past the second specimen of forest architecture which had been seen from the pool. It was a curious affair. The roof was almost as good as that of the house itself. Three sides had been roughly made of logs, but the front, of bark and poles and slabs, appeared to tell that the builders had been in a hurry or had wearied of so much heavy log-work. There was an open doorway in the middle, but windows there were none, and there was no chimney. If ever a fire had been kindled inside of that thing, instead of out in front of the door, the smoke had to find its own way out. The pole-shelter promised protection from the weather, but no comfort, unless it might be for a picnic party in summer. It was only a little better than such "camps" as trappers and hunters were in the habit of constructing for the headquarters of

considerable parties who were not going home very soon.

"That's where aunt an' uncle Sparrow used to live, before the milk-sick came," said Abe thoughtfully. "They're gone, now. So is mother."

Dennis made no reply whatever, but Abe turned his head as he walked on and seemed to be looking away off among the trees. He could not see them, but at no great distance, hidden from him by the tree trunks, were three low mounds of earth upon which the frost was resting whitely. That these mounds were there accounted for the fact that neither the log house nor the pole-shelter contained at this time a father or a mother, and that the three children were alone in the woods.

"Come on, Abe!" shouted Dennis. "Jest look at 'em!"

The shoats, as he called them, were about thirty in number, besides a lot of smaller ones. Any four-legged hog may aspire to that title if he is big enough to kill; but a human being has been known to consider it a grave offense when another called him a shoat. Those that were here were

making all this fuss around an octagonal structure of chestnut rails about fifteen feet high. A little farther on was another like it, and beyond that another. The reason why the squealers were here, and not there, though all were full of corn, was that for the present this was the crib from which they were in the habit of receiving their morning and evening supplies. Whenever this should disappear, they would transfer their hopes and their squealing. In putting up such a crib, it is only necessary to fence in the ground breast-high at first. When that hollow is filled up, more rails may be put on, successively, until the walls are too high to pitch corn over them easily from a wagon, or until the corn on hand is all in. In like manner, the upper rails may be dropped off as the corn is fed out. It is the most complete and readily made corn-crib in all the world, with the one defect that it is open at the bottom for any kind of corn-eating animal which can burrow under or squeeze in between the rails, or that can gnaw in the soft chestnut wood, or any other, a hole large enough to let him out after he has eaten his dinner and increased

his size. There are many marauders with these capacities in the neighborhood of all Western corn-fields.

The two boys went up the side of the corn-crib like a pair of squirrels, and in a moment more their cloven-footed charges were contending with one another for the first long, yellow ears that were thrown to them. They were a long-nosed, high-backed company, of the kind that in after-times, when improved stock began to come in, received the ugly name of "timber-sharks." It was, indeed, a number of long years before shoats received any better care than this. During spring and summer they were permitted to range the woods for a living; in the autumn they might even grow fat upon beech-nuts and acorns, but only such favored individuals as were penned up for "fall killing" received any corn before winter. There was one curious consequence of this kind of farming. While in a state of nature, uninvaded by white settlers, the Western wilderness abounded with snakes. Among these were the large "timber rattlesnakes," that never came out on the prairies; and with them were their

cousins, the copperheads. There were also massauga rattlesnakes, shorter and of a different color, that preferred the prairie, and were rarely found in the woods. Black snakes, milk snakes, adders, and other varieties were in liberal supply, but they all were soon to become things of the past. They were to vanish like the red men themselves, and the land they had lived in was to become almost as free of reptiles as Ireland is said to be. It is not that a shoat has any kind of innate enmity for a serpent, but that one is to him a kind of delicacy. He will root for one, chase him down, dance on him in the strangest manner until he is dead, and then, copperhead or massauga, will tear him up and eat him as if he were something better than oysters. It is said that no hog was ever known to be hurt by a snake-bite. At all events, one of the oddest sights to be anywhere obtained is that of an excited porker, back arched high and bristling, eyes flashing, teeth clashing, fiercely grunting, and springing up and down to strike a wriggling, struggling serpent with his sharp-rimmed hoofs.

There was nothing of that sort for the boys to

see, this morning. All the reptiles in that, or any other timber, were sound asleep among whatever rock ledges or swamps they had chosen for their cold-weather refuges.

It was a sharp bit of work to throw over corn enough for so many eaters, and to scatter it so that each of them might obtain a fair share. There is no kind of good manners or unselfishness or respect for the rights of others among hungry timber-sharks. It was all done at last, however, and the boys were free to come down and make their way back to the house. Nevertheless, no boys of their age, or somewhat more, ever did go home in a straight line. Not in a forest, anyhow, nor in a city where there were blocks to go around—if there might be anything worth seeing on the other side of one of those blocks.

There was little underbrush to impede strolling. There rarely is in an old forest, for bushes do not thrive well among great roots or under too much shade. There was a vast amount of winter beauty in all directions, and it was as handsome as if there had been snow on the ground, while the fact that

there was no snow at all made walking in moccasins as easy as if they had been wearing boots. As Abe remarked:

"Snow's the wust thing thar is 'bout winter—that is, if it's deep. Onless thar's been a good thaw an' a freeze, so thar's a crust."

"That's the time for deer, too," replied Dennis. "They break through the crust, an' you could a'most take 'em alive if you wanted to."

"You can foller 'em easy, then," said Abe; "but I tell you what, that Injin that was here last winter, on his snowshoes, didn't need any crust. He could jest go it, fast, on top o' the snow."

"But if you break in on a drift in them snowshoes," said Dennis, "it'll take you pretty nigh all day to climb out."

"No, it won't," said Abe. "You can take 'em off an' put 'em on ag'in. But one thing I wonder is, whar all the b'ars find holler trees enough to sleep in through the winter."

"Well," responded Dennis, after a moment of profound consideration, "don't you reckon thar's

as many trees with holes in 'em as thar is b'ars that have got to find holes?"

"Dunno," replied Abe, with a wise shake of his head. "But father killed six of 'em last winter. He says thar's about as many of 'em as thar ever was, but painters are gittin' scurse."

"That's so," said Dennis. "I saw one, once, but he was makin' off on a lope an' I didn't git but one look. They jump the awfullest kind o' long, springy jumps, an' they can 'light down from away up a tree, right down onto a feller, when he isn't lookin' for 'em."

"I don't want one of 'em to 'light onto me!" exclaimed Abe. "They can scratch any kind of human all to pieces."

There were plenty of things to talk about, as the two companions wandered hither and thither among the oaks. There were maples also, but not many along their line of march, and the woods contained an abundance of hickory and walnut, chestnut, beech, birch, and the boys themselves told of groves of buckeye, butternut, and endless copses of the nut-bearing hazel. More than one fright-

ened rabbit sprang away as they drew near the place where he had been sitting, and twice they were agreeably startled by the sudden whir of partridge wings. That is, the boys called them by that name, when they were nothing but bevies of fat quails.

"Hark!" suddenly shouted Abe. "Did you hear that?"

"Rifle!" shouted back Dennis, as if he feared that Abe was too far away to hear him unless he yelled. "Some feller's out after deer."

"'Way off yonder," said Abe; "so fur you can't but jest hear him."

When the woods are still, the crack of a rifle may be heard at a considerable distance, but trees and rocks will carry echoes around, and it is not always easy to determine the direction from which a report originally came. If a gun is fired at one end of a deep ravine, the sound of it may insist upon coming out only at the opposite extremity of the rocky hollow, in a very deceptive manner.

"He didn't shoot ag'in," said Dennis. "He

had to stop an' load. Mebbe 'twas a deer, but it might ha' been a turkey."

"Or a painter," suggested Abe. "But let's you and I light out for home. Oh, don't I wish I had a rifle!"

"You couldn't do much with it if you had one," sarcastically responded Dennis. "If I was a deer, I'd sit still for ye."

Abe had hardly anything to say in defense of his marksmanship, for Dennis was able to mention more than one occasion when he had seen him miss; but they were now in sight of the house, and the pigs had ceased their squealing, as if aware that there was no hope of more corn.

During all this time Nancy had been attending to various household duties. She had even been out to the wood-pile for more fuel, and the fire was in fine condition. It made the room look even pleasant while she washed and arranged and rearranged the limited supply of crockery and pewter. She paid some attention to her rippling mass of tangled hair, but did not appear to have any needlework on hand. After that, she did a little sweeping with a

rude broom made of hickory twigs, but it did not do a great deal of good to that earthen floor. As for the walls of the room, they were nothing but rough logs with the bark on. The cracks between the logs had been stopped with tempered clay instead of mortar. Against them, in one place, had been fastened a fine pair of deer antlers, from which a bullet-pouch and powder-horn were hanging, as if to tell strangers what such hooks were there for. On another side of the room a similar pair of hunting trophies sustained a long, wooden-handled "whipsaw," which accounted for the fact that the ceiling overhead was composed of sawed boards. There was a large box in a corner; it had no lid, and it evidently contained carpenter's tools, such as a broadax, an adz, a small saw, and some hammers and chisels. There was no grindstone to be seen, and a too careful observer might have wondered how those tools were to retain their edges. Perhaps they did not always do so. There was but one bed to be seen. It was at the right of the doorway, and far enough from the fire to be safe from sparks which might now and then shoot out at it

spitefully, and fall only a little more than half-way. If any spark had succeeded in reaching the bed, it would have fallen upon some blankets which covered a huge bag filled with corn-husks. These made a soft bed, to be sure, and the frame which upheld them was a strong one. Forked stakes had been driven into the earth at proper distances, and poles from these to chinks in the wall sustained slats of sawed timber upon which the bag of corn-husks rested. As for the height of it all, nobody would ever have been injured by falling out of that bed.

When her small housework was done, Nancy walked slowly out and stood in front of the house. There was not anything wonderful for her to see, but she looked inquiringly in all directions, as if she were searching for something in which she might be interested. There were the stumps, but now the white frost had disappeared from them, and the open and the bare, plowed ridges were not at all attractive. Beyond them were the gloomy trunks and the stiff-looking, leafless branches of the forest trees. In among these there could not be

anything hidden which might induce a bright girl of less than thirteen to go and seek for it. There was certainly a great deal of dulness in such a life as hers. It may be that a hungry expression which crept into her face had for its real meaning a longing—longing for the company of other girls and for something better than a log-house home. Then she turned and walked all the way around the house, pausing for a moment to look up at the chimney, almost as if she had never seen it before. It was a big, clumsy affair, and it was all outside of the wall of logs, except at the bottom, but it was nevertheless a pretty good chimney and could carry away any amount of smoke.

"I've seen houses with two stories," she said, half aloud, "an' some of 'em were painted. I'd like to live in such a house, an' have neighbors. I wish more settlers would come. I wish we had some cows an' some horses. I wish we had some chickens an' some ducks. I'd like to feed 'em, myself."

It did seem hard that so very moderate an amount of riches should be denied her, but the only

poultry in all that region, so far as she knew, were the wild turkeys in the woods, for all the other wild fowl larger than a quail, all the ducks and geese and brant, had gone south for their cold-weather vacations. They would return in the spring, when the bears were waking up and walking out of their hollows, and when the buds were beginning to swell upon the trees.

Nancy's walk carried her around to the front of the house again, and just as she reached the doorway she turned suddenly and listened. Then her face brightened into a smile, for here had arrived a real incident, something unusual and unexpected, to break in upon the dull monotony of that lonely clearing in the wilderness.

"It came from over yonder!" she exclaimed, motioning with her hand. "No, it didn't. It was over that way. Somebody is out thar, huntin'. I wonder who it is. I didn't want anybody to shoot those three deer at the pool. I knew a girl, once, that had a tame deer, an' those three looked as if they were a'most tame."

She went into the house to throw a stick of wood

on the fire, and when she hurried out again she could see Abe and Dennis coming along the edge of the woods. Both of them were turning their heads frequently, for they were anxious to hear another report from that rifle, as soon as it could be properly loaded, primed, and aimed at another deer, or at the same deer, if he had not been entirely killed.

"Thar they come," she said. "Mebbe they can tell somethin' about it. Like as not they saw somebody out in the woods. They were gone long enough. I'd like to see some one."

Hundreds of thousands of people at that hour were as eager for the morning news as was Nancy, but she was not to obtain any right away, as so many of them would; for when the boys came in they were only able to tell her that they had heard the gun, and that they believed they had caught a glimpse of a very large wild turkey, at a distance, entirely out of range of the guns which they wished they had had with them.

Still all three of them were several degrees more cheerful and happy, and the bright November day

was pleasanter while they talked about hunters and hunting, and wondered whether or not any wandering sportsman would come along in sight of that house, carrying home a deer.

CHAPTER III

THE HUNTER

THE horse was a small one. He was very black and very fat, but currycomb and brush had never been near neighbors of his, and it was almost as if he had put on a coat of furzy fur on account of the cold weather. That is precisely what large numbers of animals and some human beings are in the habit of doing. He was bridled and haltered, but he bore no saddle. Instead of that, he carried the carcass of an uncommonly large buck. Only a glance would have been needed to reassure Nancy that this was not the pretty creature she had prevented Abe from shooting at the margin of the pool, if he had had his father's rifle with him, for there were six tines upon his antlers instead of five.

The man who strode along at the side of the horse was tall and strongly built, and would have been a white man if his weather-beaten face had not

become so nearly copper-colored. It had probably been pretty dark in the first place, for his hair was densely black, as his long, tangled beard and mustache would have been if time and weather had not taken all the color out of them and left them snow white. He was a vigorous looking old fellow, and would have appeared several inches taller if there had not been such a stoop in his broad shoulders. As for his outfit, he did not have anything on him which had not been made long ago of buckskin, with the single exception of his cap. This had been so skilfully manufactured from the fur of an otter that an earl might have coveted it. The rifle in his hand was a long-barreled, well-kept weapon, and at his belt was a long knife, resting in a leather sheath. With some effort the fat pony was able to keep up with him, and they came out into the clearing together. The man was a little ahead, and it should have been concerning him that the young people at the house made their first remarks, but it was not so.

Dennis alone was outside at that moment, and he shouted:

"Hurrah, Abe! that pony's got a deer on him. Come out an' see him!"

It was not Abe, however, but Nancy herself who hurried out next.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I hope it isn't the one that was in the bushes."

"Don't care if it is," said Abe, as he dropped something to spring away after her. "But I reckoned that rifle was shot off on t'other side o' the clearin'. Hallo! I know who that is."

"He got him, anyhow," said Dennis, "an' he's comin' right in."

So he was, and he was pulling steadily on the halter of the pony until he reached the pool and allowed the animal to pause for a drink of water.

"That's old man Sansom," said Abe. "He's from over nigh Big Pigeon Creek. They say he got that stoop in his shoulders when he was young, because he didn't build his house high enough an' couldn't stand up in it without batting his head. He's a good shot, an' he used to fight the Injins. Killed heaps of 'em. He was down to the fight at

New Orleens, too, an' he shot some o' the British. Father knows him, first-rate."

"I heard him tell all about him," said Nancy. "He was with General Harrison, too, and he can talk all day 'bout the wars and Injins, if he can git anybody to sit still and listen to him."

"Reckon I'd sit still," said Abe, "an' he could talk all night. Thar, he's comin' right along now. It's a buck. I can see the horns."

There was no time for any further discussion of old man Sansom, for he and his pony were quickly within speaking distance. Then a wide opening suddenly appeared between the white mustache and the beard, and a stentorian voice called out:

"Oh, Abe, is that you? Whar's your Pop?"

"Pop's gone to Kentucky," shouted back Abe, "but I reckon it's nigh a'most time he was back ag'in. He didn't let on what he was goin' for."

"Ye don't say!" replied old man Sansom, his voice keeping up its pitch fairly well as he plodded on. "Wal, I kind o' reckon I know what he had on his mind. You'll all know more when he gits yere.

I went out after meat, yerly this mornin', an' I didn't have no kind o' luck till I tramped 'way over yon, 'mong the buckeyes by the ravine. Thar I knocked over this buck, an' I was torn down glad I had a hoss along. I was too fur from home to ha' toted him, an' I hadn't any ax to make a drag, but he's been makin' me travel mighty slow all day. I'll come on in, an' while you an' Nancy are fryin' some bacon I'll cut up part o' the buck an' we'll have some fresh meat. I'm powerful holler, an' I want to fill up."

This was only ordinary backwoods hospitality, for every man's fireside belonged to all his neighbors, and anything like a refusal of such an offer as that had never been heard of in those parts. Nancy tripped back into the house, while Abe and Dennis lingered to see with what rapid dexterity Sansom could take off the hide of a deer, horns and all.

"Tell ye what I'll do," he said to them, after the job was partly done. "I'll divide, an' leave ye the forequarters. I may strike another on the way home. Most likely I will, for the woods is full on 'em; or a turkey. I'd ruther have a turkey, an'

they're gittin' kind o' shy. They most ginerally do at this season of the year, or at any other time. Thar! I'll take off some fryin' cuts, an' we'll go on into the house. Glad you've got sech a prime good fire a-goin'; jest fit to grill by."

Noon had not yet arrived, but the first smell of broiling venison appeared to make Nancy and the two boys hungry; or else they caught it from Sansom, and it was a wonder how much that mighty hunter was able to do away with, including the corn pone that Nancy fried for him. If he were to be a regular boarder anywhere, it would be well for that house that game should be plentiful in its neighborhood, and that his luck should be good in going after it.

"So!" he at length exclaimed, as he came to what seemed a kind of resting-place between two cuts of venison. "You reckon old man Linkin'll be home to-morrer, or next day, or the day after? I hope he will. Wal, I don't feel like settin' out for home right away. I'll go out an' give that pony a feed o' corn, an' then I'll come back an' sit down awhile. I jest do like to see some boys an' gals

around. All o' mine are grown up. Some on 'em are livin' with me, an' some on 'em are gone off."

While he was talking he was fishing out from some place of hiding among his buckskins a pipe bowl made from the butt end of a huge corn-cob. With it came a six-inch cut of reed for a stem, and a yellow twist of home-grown tobacco, which he proceeded to shred with his long knife. The pipe was filled and lighted with a coal from the fire, and then out he went, blowing great blue clouds of smoke. It was evident that he was feeling in a first-rate mental and bodily condition.

"Jest think," said Abe, as soon as he was gone, "of how many British an' Injins that man has put under! Game, too. Tell you what, when he comes in, let's poke questions an' make him talk."

It was an idea which appeared to suit Dennis and Nancy perfectly, and it soon began to look as if a kind of conspiracy were being concocted for the purpose of opening a well-known storehouse of old yarns.

In all the talk about Sansom there was a sound of older wisdom than might have been expected

from them, but it was true to nature. All lonely human beings long for company and for fresh talk, while the young, even more than the old, are all the time ready for story-tellers.

The pony was duly fed, and then a cloud of tobacco-smoke, with a stoop-shouldered hunter under it, came striding back to the house as if it and he were in a hurry to get there. There was a vast amount of smiling good-humor in his bronzed face. The expression of it appeared to say for him that he was as much pleased with his unexpected visit as if he had shot a whole gang of deer, and some turkeys.

"Sech a day as this," he told them, "and after a feller's been out in the woods, thar isn't anything more to my likin' than to sit down by a good blaze, if you've fetched along your pipe an' tobacker. The first pipe I ever had was give to me by an Injin. He'd hollered it out o' red clay an' cooked it in a fire, an' it was a real good one. I kep' it till I went down to New Orleens with Jackson, an' thar it got broke. It'd got pretty black by that time. 'Abe, did you know that the British wore red coats?

They did; but not all on 'em. I seen some in blue, an' I shot one o' them. When I was a-sittin' on the top o' the breastwork, in the battle, it was right smoky for good shootin', too, but we fetched 'em. Sorry we had to kill so many on 'em. I don't want to ever see any more war."

Half a dozen questions jumped out at him at once from his eager listeners, and one of them hit him so that he answered it.

"No, Abe," he said, "I don't reckon they had any Americans with 'em. No Tories, like they would have had in the old Revolutionary War. My father was in that, all through, an' I've heard him tell about the Tories. But down at Orleens it wasn't so. I reckon they had English an' Irish an' Scotch an' Injins. Red Stick Creek Injins an' niggers from the West Injies."

"Why," interrupted Dennis, "will niggers fight? Do folks ever make real soldiers of 'em?"

"Wal, they do," said Sansom, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and beginning to shred off more tobacco from his yellow twist. "I had cur'ous notions, once, 'bout black men an' Injins. I was

born 'way down the Mississippi River, an' thar was hardly any free niggers 'round; nothin' but slaves. I used to see 'em bought an' sold, jest like so many critters. That way I got an idee that they wasn't jest human an' hadn't any souls, an' it was right to treat 'em jest the same as other critters. So with Injins, for the Red Stick Creeks was 'round after our skelps all the while, an' that's how I kem to keer mighty little 'bout shootin' down a redskin."

"Wal," said Abe thoughtfully, "do you reckon that Injins an' black fellers are the same kind o' human that folks are—white folks?"

"Yes, they are!" exclaimed Nancy. "I know some of 'em that are first-rate people, an' it's wrong to kill 'em."

"Nancy's right," said the old man, raking out some coals to light his pipe by. "Niggers have souls. A nigger's a human; I found that out long ago. Why, tell ye what: when I stepped down behind the breastwork, thar at New Orleens, to load up for another shot, jest alongside o' me was the blackest feller you ever saw. He'd fired, an' he was a loadin', too, same as I was, an' his face was

all grit an' pluck, an' jest beyond him was a big mulatter; an' when I turned an' looked the other way, my next neighbors were a round dozen o' full-blooded Choctaw Injins. We had French creoles, too, an' Spaniards, an' a lot of out-an'-out pirates from Barrataria, an' we were as much mixed as the British were."

"Pirates!" shouted Abe, as if he had suddenly found something. "I say, what's a pirate? I never heard of 'em. What are they like?"

He had unintentionally opened a new well that was as deep as any war, for Sansom's replies soon let out the fact that in his earlier days he had actually crossed the Atlantic on a trader. He had seen one edge of England, and touched the shores of other islands. He had seen big merchant ships and men-of-war, all sorts, with wonderful masts and sails and cannon. He had heard forecastle yarns, and had accumulated a whole handful of tales about pirates. He appeared to have an idea, however, that they were only the Red Stick Creeks of the sea. They were to be exterminated, but after all they were a kind of human, with probable souls.

"Let's brile some more deer-meat," he said at the end of one of his best and longest yarns. "I feel kind o' holler ag'in. I reckon I can fetch down another buck on my way home. All I want o' this one is the hind half, anyhow, an' we'll cut some from that this time. It's a big one."

It was getting on into the afternoon, and the long shadows that now reached out into the clearing were cast by the western trees. Sansom himself went out to the wood-pile for a new backlog for the fire, and he selected a thick cut. He rolled it in, and the three young people stood by and wondered at him when he poked forward the glowing remains of the old stick, that he might actually pick up this one and lift it over the tops of the andirons as if doing so cost him hardly any exertion.

"He's awful strong!" remarked Abe. "It takes a heap o' pork an' deer an' wild turkeys an' pone to keep him up. I reckon thar ain't many men that could ha' h'isted that log the way he did."

He had rebuilt their fire for them, at all events, and was minded to leave a warm house behind him; but when he had broiled and eaten his slices

of venison and had taken one more smoke, he arose, and said it was time for him to get out his pony and go home.

"'Tisn't so very far," he told them, "for me, but it's a good push for the hoss. Besides, if I'm to git any chance at another deer, I mustn't wait till thar's too much shadder in the woods."

The middle part of his first prize was mostly gone, but the forequarters were hung against the side of the house, and the hindquarters were secured once more upon the back of the pony. Then Sansom took the halter and began to pull. The pony followed him, and he shouted back:

"Abe, when your father gits in you tell him I was yere, an' that I'm comin' over to see him pretty soon. Tell him to come over, an' to fetch along his rifle. We'll go out after deer together."

He turned away, and the last they heard was a discontented grumble:

"It's kind o' rough that a hoss can't walk off as fast as a man can. It kind o' hinders a feller, sometimes, when he's in a hurry."

It occurred to Abe, and he said so, that the best

remedy for such an evil would be to get a horse with longer legs—as long, for instance, as were those of old man Sansom himself. In a few minutes more the pony and his legs, and even his rider, or rather leader, were utterly forgotten. Abe appeared to be thinking of something of a serious character, and both Dennis and Nancy became strangely silent. Then each of the three picked up a stool and went and sat down in front of the fire, staring into it as if they half expected to see something among the coals and ashes or sitting upon the backlog. There was really nothing to be seen in the fire, nothing but wild, red shapes which arose and danced and sparkled and disappeared. All behind them, however, the room was swarming with stories, stories, stories. So were the forest and the clearing out yonder. Away off westward, moreover, was the Mississippi River, into which the Ohio poured, and down which old man Sansom had floated on a flatboat, when he went with General Jackson to fight the British army. Away off, eastward, there were cities, some of which he had seen, with wonderful streets that he had walked in. Be-

yond them were great waves of the ocean, breaking into foam upon rocky shores and carrying over all the world the ships which the pirates were hunting for, to rob them and to murder everybody on board of them. It had been a remarkable day, and it seemed to them to be a kind of double-made affair, that was both short, too short, and very, very long.

They could hardly have told which of them was first to break the stillness; then one after another, speaking low and slowly at first, and then more and more excitedly, they began to go over the strange things which had been told them. Other tales which they had heard came creeping in, with such curious modifications of their original shapes as were made by young memories and the manner of the relating. It has often been noted of even much older narrators than they, that both fiction and what is called history will assume new shapes in the telling. There have been two entirely authentic histories of the same nation, by different authors, which bore only a distant family resemblance to each other. However, if there had been three voices at the be-

ginning of that fireside talk, there was shortly only one, since Abe could remember and could tell ten for one of the stories which were recalled and told by the others.

The shadows without deepened into starlit darkness, and within the house there was only firelight, for candles and lamps were an all but unattainable luxury for most of the dwellers in the backwoods.

"Reckon old Sansom's got home by this time," remarked Dennis; "but you couldn't lose him in the woods, nohow."

"He can't see in the dark," said Nancy, "no more'n anybody else can."

"That's the reason why he shoved right along an' got thar," replied Abe. "What I'd like to know is if he knocked over another deer. Jest the meat he had on that pony wouldn't last him long."

"I don't keer," said Nancy. "Let's go to bed. I'm tired."

So they all were, for they had a feeling that they had been performing a tremendous day's work; but the going to bed was a peculiar affair. The bed in that room belonged to Nancy, and there did not ap-

pear to be any other, nor were there stairs which might lead up to an upper story of the house, if there had been one. In the corner at the left of the fireplace, however, stout pegs had been driven into holes in the logs, and above these there was a wide hole in the planks of the ceiling, or rather in the boards of the floor of the garret. Abe and Dennis only waited to heap abundant ashes upon the coals of the fire and the front of the backlog, and then up they went, Dennis first, and then Abe. It was peg after peg, and they climbed that queer flight of frontier stairs as if it were all that could be expected by them. They were now in a kind of garret, to which there was no other window than the hole in the floor through which they had entered it, and by which a limited amount of firelight seemed now to be following them, as if to ascertain what they were about to do up yonder. It was done at once, for down they went upon bags of corn-husks made narrower than the one on the lower floor. Night-gowns were not to be expected, and small preparation was required before they were under the blankets. They were by no means uncomfortable,

and were sure not to freeze, for all day long warm air had been coming up at the hole. Even now the entire garret was finely perfumed for them with the rich odors of broiling venison and frying bacon.

If anybody had been there to watch them, he might soon have noted that while Dennis was evidently sound asleep, Abe was restless, turning over every now and then as if there were a disturbance in his mind. There really was not any. Nothing unusual was in his head, except British and Indians and black men and pirates, and some rivers and oceans with ships sailing on them among islands and cities—stories, stories, stories; but at last these began to run into one another, becoming dreadfully mixed, and then his eyes closed and they all were ended.

Down-stairs, or down pegs, Nancy was all alone. She, too, did not immediately go to sleep. It was better to lie and watch the dull glow which crept out through openings in the ash-heap over the coals, and to see what strange shapes would now and then follow one another along the walls or flit across the rough boards overhead. The door of

the cabin had been carefully closed, but it had neither bar nor lock. A wind had risen and was moaning among the forest trees. It walked across the clearing and all around the house, whistling at the corners. It made an attempt to whistle to her, not only through the door but down the chimney. She had heard winter winds doing that before, and it did not disturb her much now.

"Do hear it," she muttered, sleepily. "Winter 'fore last thar came a harricane, an' it jest howled, an' it tried to h'ist the roof off the house. It didn't, but it blew down three big hickories that were out in the open, an' Pop sawed 'em up. He said that thar wind saved him jest so much choppin'."

This wind that was now blowing was no hurricane. It was ready to serve as a slumber-maker, and before long, as Nancy listened to its whistling and sighing, she closed her eyes and forgot even about Sansom and his histories.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOUR-HORSE TEAM

NANCY slept soundly the next morning, and when she did wake up it was because something startled her. It was a great glow of red light that struck her in the face, and she sat bolt upright, exclaiming:

"Oh, somethin's on fire! Oh, yes, the boys are up."

She should have said that Dennis and Abe were down. They had begun their day by piling branches and bark on the fire with as little noise as might be, and had gone off to the pool after a bucket of water. Neither of them had offered a word of explanation for the care they had taken against wakening Nancy, and the true reason was that they had no particular excuse for it what-

ever. It was just a notion, such as comes, thousands of times, into the heads of the careless and unthinking.

Nancy was on her feet in a moment, and began her duties as housewife.

"I must have breakfast for 'em as soon as I can after they come in," she said. "Thar's water enough in the skillet to mix the pone."

There was only just about enough, without wasting any of it for mere toilet purposes, and Nancy actually began to sing as she stirred the meal into it for the required soaking. She had a clear, musical voice and a good ear, but it appeared as if the songs with which she was familiar were mostly scraps and snatches of old camp-meeting hymns. There were strange lilts and melodies in some of them, and one which she sang over and over had a weird refrain which told of the camps and shanties of the colored people. It did not altogether belong in that house, and so its plaintive music went out at the open door and away among the stumps and across the furrows to meet the boys as they came homeward, lugging between them a full

bucket of water and wishing that the pool were nearer the house.

"Hear that?" said Dennis. "Wish I could sing like her; but I can't."

"I can't, neither," said Abe. "Mother could, when she was alive. I never heard anybody that could sing like her. Sis makes me think of her."

Very likely there was a sound of the mother's voice in the daughter's, but it was something that old man Sansom had carelessly said that made Nancy herself think and sing as she did that morning. He had only half said it, and then he had stopped, but he had used the word "mother," and she thought she had also heard the word "coming," but was not sure. Anyhow, it had come back to her while she was mixing the pone, and all the songs she had been remembering had been taught her, long ago, by a voice that was now silent.

She, too, became silent at the end of that last, sweet, mournful melody. She stood still, looking into the fire.

"Wish I had a mother," she said. "Other girls have mothers."

Nothing in all her hymns had been so pitifully plaintive as was that. Her lips were quivering, and there was a deep shadow on her rosy face. She looked around her. There was not much in the house, and she had never been accustomed to a great many things which are as necessaries of life to millions of other girls. The one most important thing which was not there, however, was the presence of a woman, a mother. No answering voice came to her out of the silence and the wilderness. In a long minute more the boys and their bucket were at the door.

"Hallo, Sis!" said Abe; "let's have some deer-meat this time. It'd come good. Glad the fire's all right; we fixed it."

"You go an' cut it," she said. "I must watch the pone. I reckon it's goin' to be a real bright, sunshiny day."

"Reckon 'tis," said Dennis, "but we didn't sight a sign of any deer down thar this mornin'. Old Sansom may ha' skeered 'em off."

"He couldn't," said Abe. "Thar's mighty little huntin' goin' on jest now. The woods are full o' game. Wait till Pop gits home."

The venison was quickly ready for cooking. After all, it was a pretty good breakfast for young people who had never known anything better, and who were almost contented with what they had. After it was eaten, the pigs were to be fed, as usual, and after that all that remained was the nothing-to-do kind of life which belongs to the backwoods in winter, when all the leaves are dead and the frost is on the ground.

Nancy did not sing again, except now and then a low ripple of sound which began and died away, but Abe sat down by the fire and tried to tell over again some of the wonderful things which old man Sansom had told them the day before. He succeeded pretty well with them, while Dennis and Nancy listened, now and then making comments and corrections. They were glad to have him tell ahead, hit or miss, for it was something to while away the time and make the day appear not quite so heavy and long. The fact was that among the

shadows in that house was one which was not made by the firelight. It was larger and darker, and at the same time brighter, than any of the others. It was not all one shadow, either, for it was composed of several which were twisted and woven in together. Part of it was only a kind of "waiting" for somebody, a father who was about to come back at the end of a fortnight's absence. Another part of it was "doubt," and still another was a vague and dreamy "expectation." No set of boys and girls in all the world ever awaited the return of a father from a long absence, in another State and across a great river, without wondering and wondering, and asking inside questions of themselves as to what he might possibly bring with him. It might be a wagonload, certainly, and there was no sort of guessing what would be in the wagon, if it came.

Noon came first, and it looked as if this day also might pass and get away precisely as so many others had done. Not a word about the shadow had been spoken by either Nancy or the boys, but every now and then one of them would half turn

and look at a kind of break among the trees on the southerly side of the clearing. It was an opening which had been made by axes, for at that point something like a crooked, ram's-horn sort of road began to lose itself in the woods. There were wheel tracks in it, but these were barely deep enough to mark a plain trail. It was the only highway leading into or out of that clearing. By and by first Nancy, and then Abe and Dennis, began to wander slowly in that direction. They had almost reached the place where the road escaped from the forest around a huge stump, when a loud, shrill shout came to their ears, and the next moment they heard the same voice calling out:

"Come on, Sal! Come on, Tilly! I reckon we're a'most thar. I sighted a clearin'; I know I did. We'll be thar right soon, now."

"O John!" called back another voice. "Wait for Matilda an' me."

"Hold on, children!" commanded somebody yet farther on, and there was a thrill running all over Nancy when she stepped forward, exclaiming:

"Boys, did you hear that? It's a woman."

It had been long since the echoes of that forest had listened to the music of a half-anxious cry of a mother to her children. Whatever else it was to Nancy, however, it was also startling both to her and the two boys. They did not go forward a step farther, but stood still, and stared first at each other and then at the crooked road before them. It was not much of a road, to be sure, but then it was about to bring them something that was entirely unexpected. Then they began to retreat slowly toward their house, as if this were entirely too much for them. They walked with turned heads, nevertheless, and it was only a few minutes before Abe gave a sudden jump. Dennis whistled, and Nancy exclaimed:

"Boys, it's John Johnston an' the girls. Come on!"

Abe did not utter a word, but sprang away to meet the newcomers, who were evidently old acquaintances, and the others were at his heels. The boy member of the arriving party was nearest, of course, and he, too, was now quickening his paces.

"Hallo, Abe!" he shouted, as soon as he was near enough. "Is this your clearin'? Mother an' the waggin are right back thar. She's comin'."

"Whar's my Pop?" inquired Abe. "An' what on earth fetched you all out here? I'm torn down glad you came."

"Why, Abe," replied the nearest of the girls, "your father's gone an' married my mother, an' we're all come out here to live with you. It's a four-hoss wagon."

Just at that moment they all might see the team she spoke of, pulling the wagon out into the open. The man who walked at the head of it was apparently in a doubtful state of mind, for he was lashing the ground discontentedly with his whip and muttering to himself:

"This 'ere's the Linkin farm, is it? An' yonder's the house, an' thar ain't no barn behind it. Thar's a good patch o' cleared land, but this isn't jest what Sally Bush Johnston was told of when she married Tom Linkin. My team's pretty nigh used up, too, haulin' the waggin over this bush-whackin' kind o' road. 'Pears like it was laid out

by a sick snake, an' then he died. Tom did crawl in a long way 'mong the woods 'fore he settled. But she's got to stick to her barg'in now."

Abe had been remarking of him:

"That's old man Krume. I used to know him."

"Yes," responded one of the Johnston girls, "that's his team, an' he was real good, but he's been a-growlin' an' a-growlin' all the way."

"Glad we've got here, anyhow," said the other Johnston girl. "I'm tired."

Abe and Dennis and Nancy appeared to be a little more than willing to lead the way to the house, and to postpone as long as they might whatever more was yet to come. The wagon was coming. There was a woman in it, and a man was walking beside it, and Mr. Krume was ahead of it; but the whole picture of that arrival would not have been complete if some strange spirit of curiosity had not crept into the sagacious heads of Mr. Tom Lincoln's drove of shoats. Every cloven hoof of them marched out to the edge of the woods, and there they were now, looking gravely on and occasionally grunting or squealing to each other the

sentiments which had been aroused within them and which they could not otherwise express.

"Here we are, Sally!" said the man beside the wagon, but no immediate reply was made, and she was looking inquiringly at the house.

"This is the place," he said. "It can be made a right good one."

"I see," she replied wearily. "Anyhow, the children are takin' to each other right away. They've always been kind o' like cousins. But I jest want to git a look into that thar house."

His face fell, and he did not appear to have anything more to say just then. Krume and the team plodded onward until he pulled them in close in front of the doorway, and Mr. Lincoln helped his wife to get down. She did not go in at once, however, for here were all the young people, crowding around her, and there were three pairs of timid, wistful, hopeful eyes looking up into her own. There were even tears in those of Nancy. Abe was nearest, and his new mother stooped to put her arms around him and kiss him. Hardly had she done so before Nancy's own arms were around her

neck and her kiss also was given. Then came Dennis; but Krume was muttering:

"All right. Reckon they've kind o' beat her. But if I ain't mistaken, she was gittin' some mad 'bout this 'ere turnout. I remember she was always mighty fond of Abe. She liked the gal, too. Dennis has growed a good bit since I saw him. Thar'll be eight on 'em in one small house!"

The total count for that night promised to be nine. Krume unhitched his horses to lead them away for water and corn, and the eight he left behind him were very busy immediately. The fire was doing its best to make things look cheerful, and Abe explained to his father how there came to be so much fresh venison on hand.

"Wait," said Mrs. Lincoln, when Nancy hurriedly produced the saucepan and Dennis began to rake out some coals to put it on. "I must git some o' my things out o' that wagon. I'm gwine to make this place a little more fit for human bein's to live in. Tom, you jest take hold an' unload. Git out the table first, an' the box o' dishes. Now, if I don't set you to work on this place you may shoot me!"

There was no lack of muscle in him, and there was hardly anything in the wagon that he could not have lifted out single-handed. All the things called for were coming down and out, however, as if he were already under pretty good discipline and expected to obey the orders of his commander. Abe made himself as busy as a bee, and so did his sister; but Dennis preferred to keep out of everybody's way and to ask endless questions of the Johnston girls, while John Johnston walked out and around the house to see just how much there might be of it.

Well might the young Lincolns and Dennis stare as they did! That four-horse wagon was as a mine of wealth, and their eyes opened wide with astonishment while treasure after treasure was carefully uncovered and carried into the house. A good-sized table was set down at once in the middle of the floor. Upon this there shortly appeared an array of plates, cups, saucers, and actually a lot of two-tined forks. Those of three tines, or made of anything costlier than steel, were as yet among the wild dreams of the luxurious future

which was one day to come to that part of the United States. There were spoons of several kinds and sizes, and there were kettles and other cooking utensils. The three-legged stools might not at once be thrown aside, but Mrs. Lincoln had brought with her a full set of substantial chairs to place around her table. She was now ready to proceed with cookery, while her husband took down and brought in a large and heavy chest, which Matilda Johnston asserted was full of clothing and blankets; but her sister Sarah added, with unmistakable pride:

"Sho! the big bureau, out thar in the wagon, 's got a heap more into it than the chist has."

No more unloading and placing was done right away, for Mr. Krume had come in, and he had expressed his gratification at the abundance and good quality of the dinner which was preparing for him. He became better tempered the moment he pulled a chair to the table and sat down before a plate, with the choice given him whether he would load it with bacon or venison cutlets. All the rest sat down, but two of them were on stools after all the chairs were occupied. Then Mrs. Lincoln paused for a

moment, bowing her head and shutting her eyes. She did not utter a word, but they all knew what it meant and followed her example. It was a good promise for the future of that rough log house and its family that the real head of the concern was willing to thank God for it, even if it was not exactly what she had expected. It could not be said that she had openly complained, and after dinner the work of unloading and furnishing began again.

The old forked-stick bedstead was taken up and put down again farther along, and its place in that corner was taken by a well-made affair with the right kind of bedding. The puncheon table in the opposite corner was to remain for a while, and the box of carpenter's tools was drawn near it, to make room for a truly magnificent chest of drawers whose weight and value had required the united strength of Krume and Tom Lincoln to carry it in from the wagon without dropping it. Sarah Johnston told Abe that it was worth more than forty dollars, and he knew that that was about half the price of a good new farm, trees and all, with uncleared land at a dollar and a quarter an acre. It was im-

possible for Mrs. Lincoln to go up-stairs by the pegs on the wall, but she was told all about it, and several articles of bedding went up there, with a number of other things for which there was no room below.

"Thar, Tom," said Mr. Krume at last, "I've done the best I could for you an' Sally Bush. What I want now is to git away early to-morrer mornin', so I can reach the ferry an' cross the river 'fore dark. Tell ye what, though, you an' she are gwine to have right smart o' work a-gittin' settled down to live in this here clearin'."

He went to the door and looked out in all directions. Tom Lincoln followed him and made the same kind of survey, but there was really not one more word to be said about it just then.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW HOME

THE fire was burning well that evening. All the newly made family and Mr. Krume sat in front of it. As for Abe, he had pulled one of the three-legged stools a little behind his new mother, and there he sat, now and then looking earnestly up into her face. After each long look at her he would turn and stare around the room. It was not at all the place it had been, although the bare log walls were there. For the first time in his life he was beginning to obtain ideas concerning wealth and splendor and magnificence. Besides, he had been near when Mrs. Lincoln was giving her husband a long list of instructions as to material improvements which he was to make right away. Abe could hardly believe his ears, but among other things which were meekly promised had been a complete puncheon floor over

the pounded clay level; a new door, properly made, fitted, and hung; real sash and glass windows that would let the light in and keep out the wind; a door at the rear, and also a lean-to, whether of logs or boards; and a wood-pile a number of yards nearer the house. He was dreaming about the beauty of a puncheon floor, when Mrs. Lincoln arose, went to the bureau, unlocked its lower drawer, and took out the largest book he had ever seen.

"It's about time to go to bed," she said. "I'll read a chapter before we go. Thar ain't gwine to be any heathen in this house."

She put the book on the table, opened it, and then she suddenly turned to Abe and said to him, pointing with her finger:

"Jest do you read that aloud, Abe."

Abe stared at the big black letters, but he could make nothing at all out of them, and he whispered back despondently:

"I can't do it, nohow."

"Why?" she said; "you went to school over in Kentucky."

"Yes'm," he said. "I went to Caleb Hazel an'

Zach Riney, but I didn't git so far as readin'. I can pick out the letters, though."

"Then," she exclaimed emphatically, "'bout the next thing you'll do is to go to school, if thar is one 'round here. I can show you a good many things myself. It's time you knew how to read."

The chapter in the Bible was reverently read. Krume and all the boys went up-stairs by the pegs. When they came down next morning, although it was very early, they found Mrs. Lincoln already at work, with three girls to help her, or to hinder, and the house was getting to rights rapidly. The four-horse team and wagon were at the door soon after breakfast, and then, amid a shower of thanks for his kindness, Mr. Krume drove away into the crooked thoroughfare which was to take him to the ferry across the Ohio River. He had not quite reached the entrance of it when he asserted:

"Thar'll be a mighty sight more o' Tom Linkin an' them youngsters after they've all been under the care o' Sally Bush for a while."

There was not a doubt of it. That very morning she found time to question not only Abe, but

Dennis and Nancy, as to what they knew or did not know. It was somewhat apparent, however, that her heart was going out especially toward the slim, tall boy, who could hardly keep away from her long enough to go out after wood. One variation came when he took his new brother and sisters to the pool, and told them about the buck and the two does. Never in all their lives before had they been so near any real wild, large animals, and it did a great deal toward making them feel more contented with their new home and its surroundings.

The hours went by rapidly, and nobody in the clearing knew that it was so near noon when Abe put his head in at the door and shouted:

"Mother, it's old man Sansom a-comin', with a hoss an' somethin' on him."

Every soul was out of the house in a moment, and Mr. Lincoln stepped forward, but before he was able to say a word he was hailed with:

"Good for you, Tom! I knowed mighty well what you was up to. Glad you made out to fetch her along. I've knowed her for twenty year. She's wuth two of ye. Wal, I reckoned I'd be neighborly,

seein' as how it was a weddin' affair. I had prime luck a-goin' home an' out this mornin'. One more yesterday, an' a buck an' two turkeys this mornin' —big ones. I didn't fetch the pony this time, nuther."

Abe had noticed that first thing, for the animal upon which the really fine lot of game was packed was a high-backed, raw-boned, mud-colored horse, with remarkably long legs and a great deal of mane and tail.

Mrs. Lincoln did much better than did her husband in the matter of thanks and acknowledgments, and Tom declared that he would be out with his rifle right away; but old man Sansom talked right along, with only a moderate drop in the volume and power of his voice.

"That's all right. But speakin' o' hosses, I reckoned the pony wouldn't do nigh so well, an' I had plenty o' hosses on hand, but I didn't have no waggin to spare, an' I wasn't a-usin' any on 'em, an' so I fetched the claybank, an' he's a good one, if you have to go over to the river landin' for trade or anythin'. He can carry a heap. Some hosses'll

carry a'most as much as a waggin. I had one that I went 'way up the river with, one time, an' what I packed onto that critter to fetch home with me was because thar wasn't any more deck room onto his back to stow 'em; but I had to come home afoot, an' he kep' up with me, an' thar ain't many hosses can do that."

The welcome supply of game was removed from the back of the claybank horse and hung up against the side of the cabin, while Mrs. Lincoln and the girls were preparing for old man Sansom decidedly the best dinner that had ever been cooked before that fireplace. As soon as he had done it justice—which he did—he sat down before the fire and smoked, pulling out the same corn-cob pipe, but with it a new and very long twist of that yellow, home-grown tobacco. As he did so, he entered into a full and interesting exposition of the right way in which to plant and raise tobacco in the woods, and then to prepare it for consumption.

"I don't raise none to sell," he told them, "but I never have to buy any. My weak spot is hosses. Sometimes I have so many, all sorts, that 'pears

like they was a'most a-eatin' thar heads off. I had a hoss, once, that was kind o' holler. You could stan' in front of him an' shovel in corn all day. An' it didn't fatten him, nuther, for his ribs'd show if he was wearin' out a hull corn-crap, besides his grass; an' I sold him to a feller from down river that told me I didn't know how to feed critters an' he'd show me what a hoss like that'd be if he was only fed up. An' two months later I met him, an' I asked him if he had that hoss on hand yit; an' he said he had, but he'd had to buy another farm to raise fodder for him, an' hire hands to shovel it in."

Next to that, for lively conversation, were the endless inquiries he had to make concerning all sorts of people he had formerly known in Kentucky and Tennessee, and of quite a number of whom he appeared to have imbibed unfavorable opinions.

"You know how it is with that kind o' men, Mrs. Johnston—I mean Mrs. Linkin—" he said. "Your first husband used to be keeper of the county jail. He had lots on 'em under lock an' key, one

time or another. The trouble was with that jail it wasn't half large enough, an' so they let a heap o' fellers go by. Some on 'em got out of it, too, an' saved the county thar keep till they were convicted ag'in an' put back."

Abe could have heard Sansom spin yarns all day, but even that afternoon part of one wore out, and the old man prepared to go.

"It's all right, Tom," he said. "You've had prime good luck, whether she has or not, an' you can keep the claybank in the old pole-shelter as good as if 'twas a barn. You can keep him all winter, an' I'll lend a hand an' help you with your plowin' in the spring. I hear thar are lots o' new settlers comin' in, an' we won't be quite so hard-up for neighbors one o' these days—an' some neighbors ain't wuth havin', nuther."

He was gone, shortly, and did not know how much he had done toward making Mrs. Lincoln feel contented with her new surroundings. As for her husband, it was an unexpected stroke of good fortune to have a long-legged and broad-backed horse to carry him to the trading-places at the far-away

river landings, and to bring home for him the purchases he might now be compelled to make—such, for instance, as window sashes with the glass in, all ready to be hung up on their hinges.

One of the good things for the girls and boys, three of each kind, was that they were old acquaintances and easily accepted the idea that they now all belonged to the same family. They could the more readily nestle together under the same small roof. Mrs. Lincoln at once rejected a suggestion that some of her flock might be sent to sleep in the pole-shelter.

"No," she said indignantly; "it's good enough for pigs, or for old man Sansom's horse, but it isn't the right place for humans."

Abe took a deep interest in the claybank, with a curious idea in his mind that it was the first animal he had ever owned, and that he must pay particular attention to the matter of corn and water; but as yet he did not worry himself about such horse luxuries as currycombs and brushes.

"Wish we had a dog, too," he said to Dennis. "We ought to have a cat, and mother says she'll

git one, soon as she can. She says she won't feel all at home till thar's a cat in front o' the fire."

"We haven't any rats for one," replied Dennis; "but a cat can live the best kind on young rabbits."

"We'll have all sorts o' good times, anyhow," said Abe; but he did not know what was the next thing coming to him.

The days of idleness had passed for that household the moment the new mother went into the cabin. Hardly had Abe returned from his work at the corn-crib and pole-shelter, next morning, before he was informed that there was much water ready for use. Some of it was hot, too, and it was time for him to experience the almost novel sensation of a bath from head to foot. He needed one badly, and it made him feel as if he were becoming another fellow. There was something more to come. Mrs. Lincoln had fished up from one of her boxes a nearly new buckskin suit that was only a little too large for him. He would soon grow into it, she said, and he responded:

"Yes'm; but that isn't jest the way it goes.

When things are too big, they shrink down to me till they fit. This'll be tight in a little while."

There was no doubt on that point, but the work of improvement had not reached its climax. It was only a few minutes before he found himself sitting on a three-legged stool, with the face of a young martyr, while a pair of sharp scissors was busy with his uncombed hair. Lock after lock came off, until he began to feel light headed. At the end of it all, she made him look at himself in a mirror which she had set up over the bureau. If he had ever done such a thing before he did not say, but he could have told her that he had never been well acquainted with the boy in yonder, behind the glass. If he had actually done so, he would have been entirely correct, for a new boy by the name of Abe Lincoln was beginning to take the place of the poor young half-savage who had hitherto been known by that name. Dennis and Nancy also received many kinds of attention and improvement. Nancy appeared to rejoice in it, but Dennis grimly submitted, as to a tyranny against which he would like to rebel, if he dared.

"Some things are gittin' to rights now," said Mrs. Lincoln, at the dinner-table; "but thar isn't a pound o' hominy in the house, an' we've got to set to work an' make some. What I want first is ashes."

"I'll go to choppin' right away," began her husband submissively. "You can have loads of ashes——"

But she interrupted him: "No, I ain't gwine to wait for that. You chop for puncheons an' for more wood, and I'll burn that whole wood-pile but I'll have ashes right away. I'll go out now an' start a fire while the weather's dry. I found a good barr'l, an' you can fetch out your saw an' cut it in two in the middle."

"That barr'l," he said; "yes, I'd forgot it. It was fetched here long ago. Jest the thing to set a leech with. We'll have some hominy."

A great heap of logs and brushwood was shortly burning at a short distance from the house. One of the half-barrels produced with the saw was sitting up gravely on pegs, with its other half on the ground in front of it. Then it was a matter for astonishment how soon the half on the pegs was full

to its lips with fresh, clean ashes. Some of them had been so hot that they hissed indignantly when a bucket of water from the pool was poured upon them. Just before that was done, Tom Lincoln had bored a hole near the bottom of the leech-tub and fitted in what he called a "spile," made of two splits of wood with a hollow gouged along their middles. It was not long before a slow stream of dark red lye began to trickle down through the spile and into the tub below.

During all this time, however, the younger workmen of the combined families had not been permitted to be idle. It had been discovered that while the nearer corn-crib, from which feeding was now going on, was supplied altogether with the long-eared, yellow-grained, "horse-tooth" corn which cattle prefer, but which many people consider too coarse for meal or for human food, the farther crib contained quantities of the smaller-eared and finer-grained "flint" varieties, which neither cattle nor horses like so well. Neither do corn-raisers, for the flint will not raise nearly so many bushels to the acre, nor will it make as much pork. At all events,

the boys had been sent to that crib, with orders to sort out such grain as their mother required for hominy and the like. They succeeded pretty well and were proud of it, but the next orders given made Abe and Dennis put on wry faces. Both of them, and John Johnston, were transformed into corn-shellers, and were not let out of that unwelcome job until near supper-time. It was slow, hard work, and even then Mrs. Lincoln told them they had not shelled out enough to last so large a family as that for any length of time. They would have to shell a heap more, right away.

"We won't put any to soak to-night," she said, "for a big lot of it must go in at the same time an' soak even. We'll fill the tub, first thing to-morrer mornin'. That's right good, strong lye. I reckon it'll take off the shucks as clean as a whistle."

From hour to hour, as work went on, one fact became more and more clear concerning Mr. Thomas Lincoln. He was somewhat under six feet in height, and round-shouldered, but his every movement testified that he was possessed of unusual muscular strength. He was a man of power. More-

over, his manner of doing all that was now upon his hands told how ready he was to do anything in the world that he could for the wife he had brought out into the woods. A motion of her hand or a glance of her eye was enough, and this promised well for the future happiness of the log-cabin household. Therefore, and for many reasons, it was never again to be at all the affair it had been in the dreary, uncomfortable days gone by.

Evening came and the whole family was gathered in the one room. The door was shut and the fire was blazing high, for a chill November wind was whistling among the tree tops and shivering around the open. The flickering light searched all around the room inquiringly, as if it were an old resident returned from an absence and surprised to find so many new faces to shine upon. Something like that was what Abraham Lincoln was doing with his own eyes. He had placed a stool for himself away at the farther end of the magnificent new table, while all the others were gathered in a semicircle around the fire, until it investigated them too earnestly with heat as well as light, and compelled them to push

back their chairs. There were enough of these for all of them, for Sally Johnston was sitting in her mother's lap, with her arms around the good woman's neck. It might have been remarked that as Abe's eyes went all around, from face to face, his hands went up to his head and felt of it all over. It was not so much that they missed finding his much-valued hair in the place where it used to be, but that in their vain hunt for it they had helped him to make all this wonderful change more like a thing of this present world that he knew about, and less like some strange dream or a look into some other world, far away from these woods and that clearing.

"Tom," said Mrs. Lincoln at the end of a long silence, "I'll jest tell you what. When spring comes, you've got to spade me up a good, wide patch for a garden. I want to grow inyons an' all sorts o' things. Besides, we're gwine to have a cow of our own, if we can git one; an' I'll want you to put in pumpkins among the corn; squashes, too, and watermillions. Thar can be a mighty sight o' truck raised on sech a patch as this is."

"Good for you!" he said. "We'll jam it chuck full. I don't keer how much we put in. It's good land. 'Pears to me we can fix things right up to the handle 'fore another winter. I'm in for a cow as much as you be, an' I'm right down glad o' Sansom's hoss. I'll set out for the river——"

"No, you won't!" she exclaimed, "not till the puncheons are cut an' put down! I'm gwine to have a floor first thing. An' every tree you cut'll give plenty o' branches for the wood-pile. Thar'll be good backlogs left, too. When a house is as open all 'round as this is, you've got to keep the fire a-goin'. It'll have to be a mighty high pile, 'fore the real cold weather sets in. Besides, you don't know how much snow may come, and we may be kind o' drifted in an' shut up one o' these days."

"Wal, now as to that," he replied confidently, "thar was never any great amount o' hard weather down here, so nigh the river. It all comes farther north—up toward the lakes. But they do jest have hard winters up thar. I've heard tell o' some o' them. Make you shiver!"

As if to ascertain whether or not it would do so

he proceeded to relate a number of interesting stories that he had heard concerning the kind and cold of the snow times that were to be experienced by the dwellers in the northern woods of Indiana. The lakes would all freeze solid sometimes, he said, and the bears would freeze in the hollow trees, so that it would be late in the spring before they could thaw and come out.

CHAPTER VI

OUT OF THE SHADOW

THERE it stood on the new table, and Abe was staring at it. He had been out to see shelled corn poured into the tub of lye until it would hold no more, and he knew very well what a change would come to the kernels soon after that. It was not the first time he had seen corn prepared for hominy. After a sufficient soaking, it would have to be taken out of the tub, dried, hustled around on an old blanket, winnowed clean of the separated husks, and put away for further drying. Then it would become "hulled corn," and might be cooked and eaten as such, but it would have to be cracked before it would be fit to make cakes. He also knew that there was what was called a "hand-mill," miles and miles away from that house, but his hulled corn was not to go there

at present, for there was enough of ground meal on hand. It was this thing, here on the table, which was the next most important improvement in the Lincoln housekeeping. It was an iron mortar a foot high, and above it arose the long wooden handle of its pestle. Mortars like this were the principal mills of the frontier during many a long year after that, and they were the great aversion of all the young people, to whom, as a rule, the handling of pestles especially appertained.

The first duties of the mortar in the present instance, however, had nothing to do with corn. At that moment Mrs. Lincoln was busily scouring the old saucepan, to remove from it all traces and flavors of bacon.

"I don't want any smoked pork in my coffee," she had sharply remarked; "it'd spile it for me. Some folks don't seem to keer, but I do."

Already there had been pulled out from among her many treasures a bag which appeared to contain over a peck. When she opened it, she took out a handful of the large-beaned Rio coffee, which in those days was brought up the river by the wagon

trains from New Orleans. As for flatboats of the ordinary patterns, they indeed floated down-stream, but they never came up again, for no rowers could have propelled them against the swift currents and through the eddies. Even after steam came in and there was less need of oars, the big side-wheel and stern-wheel steamboats sometimes had all that they could do to overcome the rushing power of the floods which were hurrying southward to the Gulf of Mexico and the ocean.

The saucepan was ready at last, and then it was a treat indeed for Abe to watch the roasting and to smell the fragrant odor which arose and came to him from the burnt beans of South America.

"Now, Abe," said Mrs. Lincoln, "I'm gwine to teach you how to pound coffee. We'll have some for dinner this very day."

Down upon the floor came the mortar, and down he went with his legs around it, all willingness to make his first attempt, but not without an increasingly clear idea of what that iron pot might yet have in store for such boys as he and Dennis and John Johnston. That was because no such thing

as ready roasted and ground coffee had yet been seen in the Mississippi valley.

The next unexpected rarity to make its appearance was a quantity of coarse, brown sugar, the proposed use of which then and there was for the coffee only. Quantities of this great sweetener and civilizer were already making on the lower Louisiana plantations. More were coming on ships from the West Indies, for the commerce of the United States was growing fast. It sometimes almost seemed as if a man who would stand still and listen, might hear a kind of humming sound, as of myriads of busy and bee-like beings, hard at work upon the building of the foundations of the country that was yet to be. Everywhere the muscles and the brains of boys and girls were building, building. In some of those brains—and nobody might yet tell which of them—new and strange ideas were taking root, like young trees which were one day to bear fruits whereof no man alive had so much as dreamed.

Abe Lincoln, for instance, was not only learning from what countries coffee and sugar came,

but at the same time he was obtaining a strong impression of the effect which might be produced by long, hard pounding with iron and willing muscles. Just so, no doubt, were a great many other boys, and little good it did for some of them in the way of schooling or development. That is to say, in all that region there were small "scrub" oaks which would never grow any higher, while from the same kind of acorns, apparently, there were other saplings which in due time went towering away up into the upper sunshine. It was not with reference to any hope of that kind that before long Abe got up from around the mortar and pestle and went for a look at that "Muscovado" sugar. It made him think of some wild honey he had once tasted, and he had heard old man Sansom aver his belief that bee-trees full of sweetness might be found within a few miles of the river.

"You see," Sansom had said, "it stands to reason. The bees kem in with the white settlers, an' they git crowded out o' one place after another, jest as we do. What they need is holler trees, an' they'll find 'em an' preempt 'em, if they have to

wing it across a river to do it. That's jest what I'd do, if I was a bee."

Mr. Lincoln himself was a hard-working man that day, and he was a capital woodsman. Not many men could so rapidly bring down a tree and rive it for either rails or puncheons. As for the latter, not a large number had to be made at present, merely to cover that amount of floor. The trees selected were of the smaller sizes, not more than twelve or fourteen inches through, and of a grain as straight as could be found. Down they came, and after they were chopped into lengths the process of riving, with a wedge and maul, was performed with rapidity. Much of it was completed, trimming and all, before the end of that first hominy-making day. The trees fell and were transformed into puncheons while the corn was soaking. Abe went out to look at them, after the coffee was pounded. It was to him an exceedingly interesting operation, but those puncheons were to lift him up in the world a great deal higher than their mere measured thickness. The floor itself was not to be raised much. Several inches in depth of the pound-

ed clay was to be shoveled out before the half-logs were put in. At the very outset of the work, however, it was evident that the whole aspect of that interior would undergo a civilizing change.

The effect of all this upon Mr. Tom Lincoln himself was remarkable. He was a fine specimen of that large class of men in whom there is a great capacity for hard work, but who are altogether in need of competent direction. This had now come to him, accompanied by intelligence and a strong will, and he was by no means averse to taking the benefit offered. There are a great many households, the world over, in which the wife and mother is by all odds the best business man of the concern. Mrs. Lincoln had also the advantage of an education better than that of her husband, and with it also a deeply religious turn of mind. She was just the woman to lift up those who were around her, if they would let her. At least one of her newly acquired boys began to feel almost instantly that a new force was operating upon him. Moreover, while altogether unaware of it, he was beginning to see dimly the advantage of the education which

his new mother had obtained, and which made her so superior to her unpleasant and unexpected circumstances.

"Tom Lincoln," she said to him, just after supper, "we'll git to rights in no time. One thing I want right away, an' that's lard. You'll have to kill one o' the fattest shoats, an' we'll use the pork fresh, but I must have lard to fry cakes with. I won't have all the hominy, when it's done, put to cook in bacon fat. Jest the same with deer-meat; an' I'm right down glad I fetched along a good gridiron. This br'ilin' cuts on a stick, like so many hunters in a camp, won't do for us any longer. To-morrer we'll have a whole saddle roasted in that oven. Meat'll keep first-rate in sech cold weather as this, an' we must have most o' the choppin' done before a storm comes. After the puncheons are down, you'll go to the river for the window-sashes; then we can go to work an' set up the lean-to. I don't want to have to dig firewood out of a snow-bank, an' we'd most likely have that to do if we didn't put on a wood-shed. One o' poles'd do to begin with."

Tom almost sighed over the thought of all those improvements and luxuries, but he agreed with her in his heart, and so did all the young people, who were likely one of these days to have to bring in that firewood. It occurred to Abe, moreover, that it would be a great thing if the pool itself could be hauled a few yards nearer. He did not know that Mrs. Lincoln had already been talking, prophetically, about a deeply sunken, genuine, regularly walled-in well, as one of the beauties of the future for that clearing. It was, she had confidently declared, to have a curb and a rope and a bucket. The water from it would be cool in summer, instead of warm, like pool water. Besides, Abe himself knew that at times that pool would grow warmer and warmer till it sank away and dried up.

There was to be no pig-killing that evening, nor on the next day, for the floor was the first thing of importance. The hominy was doing well and making rapidly, but that, along with the mortar and pestle, might have in it much evil yet to be manifested. Here was a work from which Mr. Lincoln himself was to be counted out. Abe shortly recol-

lected hearing old man Sansom relate how the Indians themselves cracked their "samp" in wooden mortars, when they could not find deep enough holes in rocks to answer the purpose. It was not at all reassuring, in the present case, to remember also that no proud red man ever hammered corn. It was a task which belonged to the squaws, and which the wigwam ladies were apt to turn over to such very young braves as were still under squaw government. It was possible that in his own case even samp might yet be added to the monotonous toil attending the preparation of hominy and coffee. Only the future could unfold, but Abe was developing an aversion for that mortar.

It takes more than one day to dry out hominy, but the sun and wind could work as well on the Sunday which came as on any other day, although all chopping and pestle business had to stop. It was on Monday that the entire family put in its best efforts upon the shoveling out of the clay floor, and after that the placing of the puncheons was easily done. All the while, the wood-pile grew and the cookery improved; but Tom Lincoln was every

now and then heard to say something or other about going over to old man Sansom's pretty soon, with reference to deer and turkeys.

"Jest as soon as I've 'tended to the fresh pork," he declared, "I want to git out into the woods. 'Pears to me, what I'd like to do, more'n 'most anything else, is to hear the crack of a rifle ag'in."

Mrs. Lincoln was thoughtful for a moment, but she did not make any open opposition. On Tuesday, therefore, the fat pig was shot, as if it had been a wild one, and its carcass was put into proper shape for whatever operations were thereafter to be performed upon it. On the following morning, daylight had hardly arrived when Mr. Lincoln and Abe were at the pole-shelter, attending to the clay-bank horse. He seemed to Abe about the biggest of his kind that he had ever seen, and it was already known by the Lincoln family how much corn each day was required to feed him. Abe and his father had also eaten breakfast, and the latter had wondered why his wife had so firmly insisted upon his taking so small a boy along with him. He would have understood that matter a great deal better if

he could have read her thoughts or heard her say to herself:

"I never did see quite sech another boy as he is, for some things. He jest does take notice of every least thing 'round him. I a'most reckon he has eyes in the back of his head. That boy's up to learnin' all thar is, an' I'm gwine to see to it that he goes to school. It isn't of much use for some, but it will be for him. Anyhow, when he gits home he'll be able to tell me all about that Sansom place a heap better'n his father could. He'd come pretty nigh seein' things that wasn't thar."

When a boy has a habit of seeing all there is between him and the horizon, and with that the other habit of remembering all he has seen, he is sure to have a full head in the course of time. He had already seen, that morning, that he might have difficulty in mounting so tall a horse; but his father settled that matter by picking him up as if he weighed nothing at all and landing him safely on his perch.

"Sit well back," he said, "an' I'll git on in front. He's as gentle as a kitten, an' he's used to

carryin' double; only most o' the time his load is a man an' a deer, or mebbe a pile o' bags."

Away they went through the frosty woods, and these were so clear that no traveled road was needed by a horse with no wheels behind him. The distance to be ridden was only a few miles, and it was still early in the morning when they came out of the forest at the edge of a respectably large clearing and natural meadow, on the bank of Big Pigeon Creek.

"Here's old man Sansom's," said Mr. Lincoln —"houses an' stables an' barns! How like all natur' he an' his sons an' his sons-in-law must ha' worked to set 'em all up! Two or three more'd make a village of it. Hosses an' cattle an' hogs. He's gittin' rich, if all them critters don't eat him bone dry. Takes a heap o' corn for sech a lot as that."

Only a minute later they were hailed across the open by the loudest welcome old man Sansom could send them, and he and his quite numerous family poured tumultuously out of the house.

"Come for a hunt, have ye?" roared the old

man. "I knowed you'd come soon's you could. Got your old woman settled, have ye? Smartest thing you ever did; an' how you managed to persuade her to come beats me. I wouldn't ha' married ye for any money. Come on in, an' we'll be off in short order. You can leave that boy o' your'n here at the house, an' the women'll talk him to death while we're gone. I've been out an' sighted lots o' game, an' the deer ain't runnin' so wild as they was; turkeys nuther. I'll git 'round an' be ready in no time. Been moldin' bullets."

He had no more to say, and by the time he was ready to put his pipe into his mouth again his visitors were at the door, and a tall, strong-looking young woman had taken Abe down from the back of the horse, remarking:

"I've got ye, you picked chicken! Now you come in an' tell us all about your new mother, an' the Johnston girls, an' John. We used to know 'em, in Kentucky, an' we're mighty glad they've come. What we've been wantin' was a heap more o' nigh neighbors, somebody close by, to run in an' see. An' we're comin' right over to have a talk

with Sally Bush—but her name isn't Johnston now, it's Linkin—jest as soon's we reckon she's ready."

Abe was already aware that this was a Mrs. Jim Williams, a daughter of old man Sansom, and that she could stop talking about as soon as he could, but not much sooner. Just now the arrival of others might have turned her into a quiet and silent kind of woman, if it had not been for a swarm of small children to whom she was compelled to give her next attention—and they all had to be spoken to.

"Come right along in," said the larger woman, who now took hold of Abe. "Most likely you've had some breakfast, but a little more won't hurt ye, not after sech a ride. I reckon your father'll eat somethin', too, while my father's gittin' ready."

"The boys'll 'tend to all that's outside," he told her. "But we won't take along that claybank hoss. I'd ruther have my yaller gray; he's every bit as good a walker, an' what's more, he'll stan' still all day jest whar you plant him, an' that's the kind o' hoss for a deer-hunt, for you don't need to hitch him. I say, Abe, you was askin' me all sorts o'

questions at your house. Do you see that? An' you don't know what it is?"

Abe's eyes followed the pointing finger, and he did see. It was a long string of something hanging against the log wall of the house; but the old man was correct, for he could not even guess what it might be.

"Can't hit it, eh?" said Sansom. "Wal, them's from Gineral Harrison's old war with the British and Injins. Him an' Commodore Perry—up 'round the lakes and on 'em. Some day I'll tell ye how I kem by 'em, but not now. They're ginooine Shawnee Injin skelps, an' some others mixed in, mebbe. They was took by the Maumees, an' a hull heap o' the Maumees lost thar own ha'r at about the same time."

Scalps of red Indians! What an opening into the ancient history of America that was to a boy like Abe! They may have been taken when he was a baby in the cradle, so long ago was that old time. He was staring at them in open-eyed astonishment and wonder, when the old man took down from its deer-horn hooks a heavy, rusty-looking old fire-

arm, upon which was an equally rusty fixed bayonet, and shouted:

"Jest look at that, will you! It's from New Orleens! When Gineral Pack'num's redcoats broke an' run, I jumped down from the top of our breastwork, whar I'd been shootin' on 'em, an' I gathered that piece, an' I jest smouged it from the officers that collected the arms, an' I kep' it to this day, to remember Gineral Jackson. I dasn't fire it now, for fear it might bust; but the bagonet wouldn't miss fire, I reckon. Jest heft it!"

Abe took the old musket with more pride than he could tell. He did not utter a word while he turned it this way and that. He even tried to take aim with it, and all the while he was internally grappling with a new geographical formation which he had never known before. It included the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico, the northern lakes, and all the rest of the world. The string of scalps and the musket were doing a great deal toward making things appear as realities at long distances from his own cabin and clearing.

"Old man," said Tom Lincoln, "it's time for

you an' me to git out, if we're to do anythin' wuth while in the woods. Come along!"

"I'm with ye," replied Sansom, and out they went, leaving Abe to be torn away from the military trophies and his new geography and history, to be put down at a table with a real bowl of milk before him and all the hominy he wanted. That was the first bowl of milk he had put a spoon into since he had lived in the very young State of Indiana, and it was worth a good deal to get it. He at once made up his mind that when he became a man he would keep cows, if he had to milk them himself. That purpose was made stronger yet by the unlimited butter, as strange to him as the milk had been, and his big slice of corn-bread quickly assumed a golden appearance which no pone had ever worn that he could remember.

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE open doorway of the Lincoln log house put on a look of eager expectation, if not of actual disappointment, at the hour when the tree shadows grew long, that evening. The fire was blazing brightly and cooking was going on before it, but only Matilda and Sally Johnston were watching the corn-bread in the big skillet. Dennis Hanks and John Johnston were out at the corn-crib, attending to the pigs, and Mrs. Lincoln stood a little inside the door, staring away into the forest. All she could see there was the leafless trees and the increasing darkness, and she said, half aloud:

"Jest as I might have expected. Tom won't be home this night. I reckon nothin' could ha' happened to him, or to Abe. Tom an' the old man wound up thar hunt at the Sansom place. It

wouldn't do for them to try comin' through the woods any later'n this."

There she paused, and went for a look at the skillet, but she returned to the doorway and her watching. She was beyond the threshold when she said:

"I feel kind o' queer, too, to be left alone at night in sech a place. Glad thar ain't any Injins nowadays. Away back, when I was a little gal, 'fore the War of 1812, 'fore the Red Stick Creeks was put under by Gineral Jackson, that used to be what folks thought of, sometimes, about dark. The redskins used to come, too, now an' then, an' when they struck a place it was all up with every soul in it. They never spared man or woman or child. Oh, well, I wish he'd come home, but he won't. What a boy Abe is! I must try an' do something with him. He's wuth it."

She turned, and looked in at her own girls and Nancy, and she saw the two boys coming in. She was not to be altogether lonely, after all, and there were no real dangers of any kind creeping toward her household.

Not a great while after that there was a pleasant gathering around the Lincoln fireplace and the table; but there was a larger one, with several grown-up people in it and twice as many younger, in front of the blazing hickory logs at old man Sansom's. He and Tom Lincoln had almost been caught in the woods by their great good luck. It had followed them all day, or rather it had walked on ahead of them, enticing them to follow it up. The yellow-gray horse had behaved himself finely, always willing to stand still as long as might be required of him, and never starting again until made entirely sure that he must go; but his back was a sight to see when he was once more led within the rail fence that surrounded his own house and stable. On his patient deck—if it might be called so—was a cargo consisting of four deer and nine wild turkeys, to bear witness to the abundance of game and the accurate marksmanship of his two human companions. Neither of them was likely to miss a fair shot at any time, and two such experts together were sure to be jealously shooting against each other, as if for a prize. They were critically

discussing the several prime shots they had made, long after they had exhibited their return cargo to the small crowd of admirers which hurried out to meet them.

Old man Sansom's sons and sons-in-law took care of the game, and the only remark Abe was heard to make sounded like:

"I reckon Pop and I'll have to walk home to-night, an' how we're to find the way in the dark I don't know."

It was only a few minutes before he learned that it would not be necessary for him to know, and that he was to sleep that night in a bunk in the lean-to behind the Sansom house. He had been in a state of carefully concealed excitement all day, seeing so much and hearing so much, and surrounded by such an unaccustomed throng of people. He had taken looks at everything he could get at, in or around the place—every horse and colt, every cow and calf, every dog and pup, and, as nearly as might be, every pig. There were no hens or chickens to be seen, but there was an exceedingly intelligent tame raccoon, which had stirred up in his

visitor a determination to catch one like him and train him up in like manner. He said as much to old man Sansom, at the supper-table.

"Abe, my boy," responded the always ready story-teller, "that's what you'd better do. The right time to catch coons or possums, though, is in the winter, when the frost's good an' hard. It's about twenty year gone, now, down in old Tennessee, that I was out choppin', an' I kem across a big black walnut-tree with a hole at the root of it, an' a dog that was with me began to bark his head off at that hole. Dogs mostly won't go after coons in winter, but he did, an' I set to work on that tree an' down it kem. It was nigh four foot through at the butt, an' it was clean holler for thirty foot to the branches. An', Abe, you wouldn't believe me —nobody else ever did—but that thar holler was jest packed full o' coons, all as fat as butter an' all fast asleep. I didn't try to count 'em, but I gathered no end o' prime coon-skins, an' what I'd been reely hopin' for was b'ars. That thar holler was jest made for b'ar. I say, Abe, what'd you think o' findin' a pack o' b'ar four foot thick an' thirty

foot long? I've killed right smart o' b'ar, too, but they're gittin' kind o' scurse, an' so is painters. I mean to fetch in a painter 'fore spring. I've heard four on 'em call in the woods lately, or mebbe 'twas the same chap callin' four times; you can't 'most allers tell."

It was at about that time that a new idea began to come to Abe concerning the old man. It grew out of things which were said by the rest of the family, and the amount of it was that all of them had heard, long since, about all that he had to tell. He was an old book which they all had read, perhaps a great many times, till they knew it by heart. Therefore, during most of his time, all his wealth of history had to remain corked up within him, and he was all the better pleased to have an opportunity, like Abe and his father, to bring out as much of it as he could and give them also the benefit of it. Abe, at least, was more than willing to have him remain uncorked, even after Bob Sansom had meanly said something about "that thar holler black walnut-tree havin' growed some, sence last winter was a year ago. More coons in it, too."

Nevertheless, the old man was a tip-top narrator, with plenty of fun in him, and before long he was having things pretty much his own way. One more thing there was which helped the sociability amazingly, and which also illustrated the natural productiveness of those woods. It did seem as if the Sansom young people had strained all their capacities to gather all the nuts that were to be had. Hazelnuts as good as filberts, walnuts, hickory-nuts, butternuts, beechnuts, all in profusion, with hammers and flat-irons to crack them. It was grand, and all along with the cracking and kernel-picking ran the often interrupted ripple of the story-telling. Not only old man Sansom himself, but some of the young men and women, and even Tom Lincoln, were ready to contribute to the stream now and then.

Abe found his head becoming more and more crowded with short yarns and long, from the South and the North and the West, and even from the Atlantic shore and from beyond the sea. All this was what made it so late before bedtime, and why they all but let the fire die out; and why, when Abe

went and curled himself up in his bunk, he shortly dreamed that it was on a flatboat, and that in it he was gaily drifting down the Mississippi River. In his mind, as he so drifted, was the purpose of sailing on, on, across the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, until he should land upon Barrataria Island, among the pirates and buccaneers and African slave-dealers.

The next morning did not come to him as early as usual. He had no water to bring from any pool, nor did he have any pigs to feed, nor wood to bring from any wood-pile. He had a liberal breakfast to eat, however, and then the claybank horse was at the door. He saw at once that he had reasoned correctly about a walk home for himself and his father, for no less than four of the turkeys and two of the deer were tied upon the animal's ample back, and old man Sansom remarked:

"'Tain't no more'n your sheer, Tom. An' besides, you must stick to your choppin', an' your goin' to the river arter them winders. An' we've four rifles, ready to go out, any time we run ashore, for fresh meat. 'Tisn't like sech a house as your'n

is, with only one gun in it. Sometimes our deer come a'most in range from the door. I lived in a house once whar all ye had to do was only to sit on the door-sill an' wait for 'em; if ye was willin' to wait long enough, they was sure to come, an' all ye had to do was to drop 'em an' fetch 'em in. Tell your wife we're all comin' over to see her soon's we can, an' she must be neighborly. We'd like to have her step over here any time, an' fetch her gals along. We're mighty glad to have somebody livin' next door, as it were, an' they say thar's a heap more a-comin' on in the spring. I jest do hope they'll come!"

It would have required another broad-backed horse to have carried all the good-will, in addition to the game, when Abe and his father set out for home. That is, Abe led the horse and cargo, while Mr. Lincoln strode on ahead, rifle in hand, with a sharp lookout for game, as if he were not well enough supplied already. Abe had no rifle, but his eyes were busy, for he had heard things at Sansom's which had burdened him with an idea that among the branches of those gigantic trees he might

at any moment catch a glimpse of one of the cougars, or "painters," whose voices had been told of as making music in the night.

The homeward distance did not amount to anything for a boy who was on the lookout for wild beasts in tall trees; but as they were at last entering their own clearing, Abe suddenly began to feel that he had undergone a change of character. Instead of being a possible cougar-hunter, he was turning into a kind of triumphal procession. It was not altogether the claybank horse, nor his father, nor even the load of game, that did it. Vastly more effective than anything else was the enormous list of news items which he had collected for his good mother, and which he felt sure she would be glad of. He had been setting them in order for her, all the way, and was eager for an opportunity to unload. Just behind this part of his precious gatherings was a consciousness of the extraordinary quantity of brand-new yarns which he would now be able to distribute to Nancy, Dennis, Matilda, and Sally. Neither of them had ever heard the yarns before, whatever might be the misfortune, in that

respect, of the Sansom family. He did not know that he had been in a first-rate kind of frontier school, for it was as if at least a month of hard study had gone over him while he was inspecting his new neighbors, who were in their own opinion so very near.

Something of the same idea concerning nearness appeared to be entertained by Mrs. Lincoln herself, and it was only a little while after he reached the house that she put down one of the wild turkeys to exclaim:

"Now, Tom, I'm so glad of it all. They're right down good people, and I kind o' feel safer, an' not quite so lonely. I'll feel better, while you're gone to the river after the things. It's real good to have neighbors."

The fact that she had so much to say to him left Abe altogether at the mercy of the rest of the family, and they went through him as if he had been the latest edition of the Big Pigeon Creek Occasional News and Advertiser. If the journal indicated were not exactly printed, it was at least quite full of interesting matter, some of which might

even rank as selected fiction. All newspapers do more or less with fiction, especially in their accounts of battles and of occurrences in foreign lands, not to leave out their accounts of successful hunting and fishing, such as Abe's.

The laying of the puncheons was finished that afternoon, and a sufficient amount of corn had been hulled for immediate use. It would, therefore, be well for Mr. Lincoln to set out on his errands the next morning, with the claybank for company.

Morning came, and there was no manner of delay about their going, for Mrs. Lincoln sent them. No sooner were they out of sight on the crooked road, than the energetic manager of the family affairs set all her young assistants at work. Their first duty was to bring water from the pool and fill to the brim another barrel which she had found on the place, and two more which had been in the wagon among her own goods, and which were now empty.

"Thar's no cistern," she said, "but I won't be ketched in any snow-storm with no water nigher than that thar pool. We might all git awful dry

'fore we could git to it, in some storms I've seen."

They had to become drawers of water, therefore; and if they were not also hewers of wood, they at least had to pick up and bring to the house quantities of big chips and branches which Mr. Lincoln had made ready for them in his chopping. He had thought of it, himself, for he had made short cuts of many of the larger branches. All things within doors were bright and cheerful when evening came, and Mrs. Lincoln looked around her from the supper-table, smilingly, to say:

"Bless my soul! I've seen rooms with carpets on the floor that didn't show any tidier than this does. I'm glad we're all here, an' I reckon your father can finish up an' git back to-morrer night."

There was nothing but the red glow from the fire to see it by, and Abe, too, had been making an inspection.

"Tell you what, mother," he said, "one o' the big things at old man Sansom's is a lard-oil lamp, with a wick an' a glass chimbley. It'll light up a hull room; but Mrs. Bob Sansom says she doesn't

set it a-goin' often, 'cause it uses up sech an all-killin' lot o' lard. But they lit it when we were thar, an' it burnt till it burnt the chimbley black as tar."

"We can't have one jest yet," she told him, "but I mean we shall, one o' these days. I've seen some that didn't black the chimbley. Now, you jest go ahead an' tell us what else you saw, an' who was thar, an' what they said. I've been so busy I couldn't git at you 'bout it till now."

Abe's tongue was let loose, and she might as well have set a young river going. This was one thing he had been waiting for, and all that he had previously half told was now in better shape to be told over again. No kind of story goes off at its best the first time it tries. There are always some things that were forgotten, and some others which ought to be tacked on to make it sound right. The art of tacking on the missing things is what makes one historian a better novelist than another.

"It's jest as I said about you, Abe," said his mother thoughtfully, at last. "You didn't miss a thing. You may go to bed now, but I want to hear

the rest of it to-morrer night—especially about the cows. An' what's more, I'm gwine to make Betty Sansom give me one o' them pups. What this house needs is a dog o' some sort, an' he'd better be started on the place while he's young; then he won't run away, first chance he gits."

The time had arrived for the boys to go upstairs, but Abe was still thinking of the dog question. He was half-way up the pegs, when he paused to turn around and hang on while he said:

"Mother, one o' them dogs o' Sansom's is as big as a calf. It doesn't take so much to feed him, nuther. He ketches his own rabbits."

"That's the kind I want," she told him. "The wust o' some dogs is thar keep, an' if you don't feed 'em they git to be all skin an' ribs. I knew a dog once that'd stay fat on corn pone. But they're scurce, I reckon."

It was only seventeen miles to the store or trading station where Tom Lincoln expected to make his purchases, and his wife was right about his being able to get home next day. He was aided, indeed, by the claybank, and was urged onward by

the first flurries of a coming storm of snow. The warmest kind of welcome awaited him, and a good dinner; but hardly had he risen from the table before the work of putting in the new windows had to begin. It did not take a great while, and when it was done there was, for the first time in its history, a fair amount of light in the house after its door was shut. That also could now receive some attention, with an assurance that an entirely new one would have to take its place as soon as tree-trunks could be sawed into boards for the purpose.

"The cuttin' through o' the back door can wait a bit," said Mrs. Lincoln. "The lean-to must go up first, but all the firewood must be fetched an' stacked agin the house, both sides o' the door; it'll be a fender from the weather, an' it'll be right handy. The shoats have all come up to the crib, an' what they need thar is a rail pen to keep off the snow from 'em. Thar'll be plenty for us to do the rest o' this winter."

It looked as if there would be, now somebody had come to boss the doing of it and make sure that it was not neglected. Moreover, one of the

features of the improved situation was the effect it was having upon Mr. Thomas Lincoln. The activity insisted upon appeared to be doing him good, and he was notably cheerful as he went on from one thing to another. When he first took a look at the full water-barrels, he exclaimed:

"Gineral Jackson! I never thought o' that. I didn't have but one barr'l, nohow. Tell ye what, when spring comes I'll dig holes an' sink 'em, an' the water'll keep cool in hot weather, if you kiver 'em up. Besides, I'll do as she says, an' fence in the pool, so's to keep the hogs out of it. Hogs'll spile any water for drinkin'. But I'll chop some more wood to-morrer, storm or no storm."

That was what he intended to do, but there was no such piece of work before him. After dark, that evening, he was industriously shifting the wood-piles to their new places near the door, assisted by the boys and girls, and under strict direction, but they had not completed their job when they all were compelled to go into the house. It was not the increasing gloom only that put an end to their going and coming. A great cold wind from the north had

arrived, with a backload of driving snow. It came sweeping on over the tops of the trees until it reached the clearing; then it made a dive which appeared to be aimed mainly at the door of the cabin; it smote vigorously upon the roof; it rattled the new windows; it tried to push in the door; it howled angrily down the chimney; it went to the pole-shelter and screeched in at the claybank horse, and then it traveled on southward. But Mrs. Lincoln remarked:

"Abe, I reckon this is one o' the blows old man Sansom was tellin' of. You said he said it would last about three days. I don't keer if it does; we're all ready for it now."

CHAPTER VIII

NEW SCHOOLS

SOME things—a great storm, for instance—may make a tremendous bluster without accomplishing anything else of importance. When morning came, it was discovered that but little snow had fallen, and that in the woods it had made nothing but a pretty white carpet, which would not interfere with either hunting or chopping. As for hunting, indeed, such a snow was an enemy of the wild animals, for it compelled them to leave trails which their pursuers might follow. No more game was needed at the Lincoln place right away, however, and the business of improvement might go on uninterrupted by any excursions after deer or turkeys. Mrs. Lincoln herself had an altogether different undertaking on her mind, for Abe had brought home from Sansom's one particularly important piece of information.

"That's what I wanted to know!" she exclaimed when she heard it. "Abe, if thar's to be any kind o' school over on Little Pigeon Creek this winter, the hull lot o' ye have got to go to it. Only a mile an' a half to school? Why, I had to travel twice that distance sometimes, and it wasn't much of a school, nuther. I'm gwine to take the claybank to-morrer mornin' an' go over an' see what it is. The children must learn somethin'."

That was a thing that made the house appear quiet and sober all that day, as if the shadow of knowledge to come might be settling down into it. All of them had been to school, more or less, over in Kentucky, but none of them had heretofore been in fear of any such thing here in the safety of the woods. They talked about it almost gloomily, and wondered among themselves what sort of machine it would prove to be. Not the least interesting of their mutual inquiries and forebodings related to the great question of whether or not the teacher of the reported school was in the habit of "puttin' on the gad." They were aware that there were wide differences of method and management in that re-

spect among men of learning. There were said to be schoolmasters, indeed, who believed that no boy could really do well with his letters and figures without frequent assistance from a stout switch. These were apt, too, to be faithful men, ready at any moment to do their whole duty. As to that matter, however, Nancy had an idea which was of more than a little comfort to half of them.

"I don't keer," she said; "the lickin's all go to the boys. Over in Caleb Hazel's school, when any o' the girls had been cuttin' up, he used to lay it all onto some o' the boys, an' didn't they ketch it! I reckon they did. Served 'em right, too."

"That's so," replied Matilda Johnston. "Abe an' John an' Dennis can take all the whackin' that belongs to this house. I don't want any."

The general subject of education was taking a strong hold upon Abe's own mind, for it fitted in with a number of the new things which he had been hearing. There was now at least one book in the house, and before the day was over he had it spread open wide upon the table. If he could not read it, he could turn over the broad leaves and stare at

the pictures, of which there were several. These were truly remarkable woodcuts, of the kind that ornamented most of the earlier editions of the Bible which were printed in this country. The first of them to really fasten his attention was a vivid representation of the Flood. It was a vast waste of rough water, in which trees, rocks, human beings, and wild animals appeared to be floating or swimming vaguely around in the neighborhood of the ark.

"Old man Sansom told me," remarked Abe, "that he saw jest sech a flood as that is, 'way down the Mississippi, only he didn't say anybody drowned. I'd like to see one on 'em, an' I will, some day."

There was a great deal to be learned from the Flood, but after a while he turned from that to an accurate picture of David slaying Goliath. The victor in that memorable duel appeared to be a boy not much taller than Abe himself, while the giant, by comparison, was a man who could have picked chestnuts from a tree top.

"Wal," said Abe doubtfully, "I don't see how

he could ha' hove a rock o' that size. But I'll make a sling an' try it on."

He tired of that, and turned the leaves till he came to a picture of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, by way of a road about wide enough for one wagon, and that had great cliffs and crags of water on each side of it. The runaways from the land of Pharaoh and trouble were marching four abreast, and it occurred to him:

"I think they ought to ha' cleared out that track a little wider."

On he went until he had wearily studied every work of art in that big book. Then he shut it up, because the table was needed for supper, and he did not at all know that his first picture-gallery had been to him something like a small library, full of instruction.

Mrs. Lincoln was as good as her word, in the morning, although she had to ride the claybank without any saddle. He did not seem to care, and she never spoke about it. All the frontier women were well accustomed to bareback riding, and so were all the men. What she really needed, indeed,

was to obtain a reasonably clear idea of how she was to find her way to the neighborhood of the log-built meeting-house and the log schoolhouse that was near it, on Little Pigeon Creek. Her husband offered to accompany her, and so did Abe, but she rejected both propositions. The entire family gathered at the door to see her ride away, and they gazed after her with an unanimous opinion that tremendous consequences must depend upon the doing of such an errand by such a woman.

It was not until nearly nightfall that the claybank returned with his invaluable burden, but he had done his duty for the cause of education. Mrs. Lincoln was able to call out, even before she dismounted:

"Tom, I did it. I saw old Dorsey that teaches the school. It's in sech a cabin as I expected. You can't but jest stand up straight in it, an' thar's greased paper for winder-glass, an' thar's a puncheon floor, an' that's somethin'."

"Glad you found him, an' right down glad you're home ag'in," he responded. "We were gittin' kind o' anxious 'bout you."

"You needn't, then," she said. "But he was right down glad to hear o' six new scholars, an' it'll make his school half as large ag'in as it was; but if they keep on comin' in, he may have nigh onto two dozen 'fore spring. He 'pears to be a decent sort o' man, with a kind o' rope-colored beard, an' he's jest powerful polite."

After she was in the house she had so many more things to tell, in her delight over her success, that the young people hardly had a chance to ask questions. The fact was that she answered a great many more than she could have asked. At all events, they were compelled to make up their minds that they were to be condemned to the pursuit of knowledge under the care of Mr. Hazel Dorsey, whether or not he was a whipping teacher.

One point which Mrs. Lincoln had ascertained was of great importance in a region where there were no bookstores. She had been told that there were already in the schoolhouse almost enough text-books to go around. Any deficiency in that respect was to be remedied easily by putting two scholars

on one book, whenever they were digging at the same task.

"That's all right," thought Abe; "then neither on 'em'll be gittin' on ahead o' the other. It's jest fair to both on 'em."

"When are they to begin to go?" asked Mr. Lincoln dubiously. "If thar's much more snow to fall, they can't git thar reg'lar every day."

"Wal," said his wife, "it's the first week o' December. I want 'em to start in now, so's to git right smart a-goin' 'fore Christmas. Old man Dorsey's gwine to spend that an' New Year's Day with his friends in Kentucky. I don't feel quite sure when he'll git back. I've known men to go away——"

There she paused, and went to put a stick of wood on the fire. The records of all that region were full of memories of individuals who went to pay visits, of one sort or another, and whose absences had been continuous.

From the moment of Mrs. Lincoln's return, and as if she had brought it with her on the claybank, a different spirit began to work its way around

among the young people. Swelling rapidly within them was an enthusiasm concerning Hazel Dorsey and his log-house academy, and an hourly increasing curiosity relating to the other boys and girls with whom they were so soon to become acquainted.

"Some on 'em'll be bigger'n we are, an' some won't," remarked Dennis combatively, "but I ain't gwine to take any kind o' sass from 'em—no, sir! An' I reckon Nancy an' the girls won't, nuther."

There was a vigorous chorus of assent to that proposition. Then the discussion of the general subject of education died out into thoughtfulness concerning the morrow, and the pupils that were to be went to bed full of all kinds of dreams concerning the state of social affairs on Little Pigeon Creek.

When morning came, Mr. Lincoln himself attended to the wood-pile and the pigs, while Mrs. Lincoln anxiously busied herself with the outfit of her student folk. They had neither cloaks nor overcoats, but there were comfortable leggings to be put on, for she appeared to have an abundant provision of such things among her household goods.

They were comfortable things to have, although the snow was not deep and the distance was not considered worth mentioning, for going to school on the frontier.

Quite a procession at last walked out of the Lincoln clearing, and it began its march almost dignifiedly, gazed after with loving eyes by the good and thoughtful woman who had set it going. Beside her in the doorway stood her husband, and he, too, was both pleased and thoughtful.

"Sally," he said to her, "I do hope they'll make out to learn somethin'. Sometimes I kind o' think that if I'd had more to do with schools an' books when I was little—wal, I dunno—it might ha' been wuth somethin' to me—I can't say exactly what. But I'm glad you know more'n I do."

"I mean they shall learn all they can," she told him. "I'm gittin' a cur'ous notion 'bout that boy Abe. I never did see another jest like him. I always said so, over in Kentucky. Thar's the makin' of a man in him, onless I'm awfully mistaken."

"He's pretty bright," admitted Mr. Lincoln,

"but nobody can tell what's in a boy no older'n he is. Reckon we'll see better by an' by."

The procession started well enough, and it went on two and two for a considerable distance, appearing to despise altogether the light and fleecy snow carpet that it kicked aside. Then a rabbit dashed across the path, which was no path at all, and the boys at once began to talk about dogs. The call of a wild turkey was heard away off at the right, and the column broke all to pieces in an eager rush which resulted in only one fleeting glimpse of a great bird getting safely away from unarmed hunters and huntresses. The march was resumed, but its order was no more what it had been, and it needed only a gang of deer, half a mile farther on, to make them all half wish that there were to be no books for them that day.

There were not to be a great many. When they reached the bit of a log coop which served as the young seminary, they discovered that one thing and another had made them late, in spite of all the care of Mrs. Lincoln. The procession halted to reconnoiter, for it understood that the other scholars

must already be in their seats. The shrill voice, indeed, of some boy who was undergoing a difficult lesson might have been heard quite a distance into the woods. That part of his morning exercises plainly related to good school discipline, order, and respect for the head of the academy. He was likely to remember for some time a teaching which was so liberally punctuated. The newcomers also were receiving information.

"Thar!" exclaimed Dennis, "he's ketchin' it! I say, Abe, most likely your turn'll come next. Oh, but won't you jest holler!"

Abe did not say anything, for the procession was again in motion, and he was at the head of it, thinking deeply concerning the proper method for breaking into that schoolhouse. For that very reason, however, and being absorbed in thought, he missed the right way, and led his detachment, or reenforcement, straight on into the fort, without so much as hailing the garrison by knocking at the door. More than that, he was leading them daringly forward, and they all were following recklessly, when a gruff voice came from a short

man who had just laid down a limber-looking switch.

"Stop right thar!" he commanded. "Now, walk back to the door! Stand still! Face this way! Look straight at me! Bow! Say 'Good morning, Mr. Dorsey.' All of you say it, once more."

Each of his orders had been promptly obeyed, at first with some confusion, and then with better precision. The second chorus of "Good morning, Mr. Dorsey," was done very well, if Abe had not instantly led off in a third, which was superfluous. Nevertheless, Mr. Dorsey said, with dignity:

"Now you may come forward and shake hands. I am glad to see you all, and to have given you your first lesson in good manners. One of the most important things in this world is to know how to git into a room and how to git out of it with propriety. Most people don't know how. Now, my next duty is to diskiver jest how much each one of you already knows about books, especially 'bout the correct spellin' of words. Thar is really nothing of more importance than learning how to spell your native tongue correctly. I will begin with the girls.

The boys will also step back two steps, and stan' right thar ontil their names are called by me."

Dennis and John and Abe stepped back, while Nancy and Sally and Matilda bravely faced Mr. Dorsey. They did pretty well with their spelling, too, until he cruelly broke them all down, one after another, with dreadfully tangled words of three and four syllables each.

"That will do," he said. "Go to your seats. Now for the boys. It is probable that they will not do so well. Girls a'most always do thar hard spellin' better'n boys do. It comes nat'ral to 'em. Abraham!"

The seats spoken of were rough plank sofas, without any other backing than the log walls behind them. They were taken, however, and then there was complete attention paid, all around the room, by every young student in it, while Abraham Lincoln stood firmly and spelled correctly the first word given him. It was one he had learned long ago at his first school in Kentucky, and it may have been the only one, for he did not hit the mark again, although he was made to fire a number of verbal

shots. He was not lonely, however, for his two companions appeared to become panicky and made out somewhat worse than he did.

"Go and sit down!" commanded the schoolmaster. "It is jest as I was expecting. Spellin' will always be done better by girls than by boys, and how to account for it I do not know. It is so of some other things."

He did not see fit to specify any of the other things which he did not know, but that was made a day of trial to all his pupils, especially to the newcomers. There was one patch of blue sky in it, nevertheless, for he carried that rare luxury, a watch, and an hour came when, after gazing sternly upon the open face of it, he declared that the time for the accustomed recess had duly arrived. Then the scholars were all called upon to stand up in their places and bow to him. That being done, they were at liberty to attend to their several luncheons of cold venison, corn-bread, bacon, or turkey, and to take up the important business of getting better acquainted with each other. It was taken up, and the number and kinds of questions which flew back

and forth were extraordinary. The feeling grew rapidly among them that something like a "settlement" was beginning to gather in the woods along the borders of Big and Little Pigeon Creeks. One of the boys took pains to explain to John Johnston that the difference between those two names did not at all refer to the respective sizes of any winged creatures, but rather to the quantities of water flowing in the indicated hollows.

"Wal," he further explained, "they're big an' little, most o' the time; but when thar's any kind o' fresh a-runnin', one on 'em's as big as the other, an' a hoss can't wade either on 'em."

School was dismissed long enough before sunset to give even the scholars who came from long distances a chance to reach their homes before dark, and they were all very ready to do so. So was the schoolmaster himself; but he did his last duties concerning good manners, for he made his flock march out of its educational fold in single file, in a perfectly orderly manner, and this was a great credit to him.

Once in the woods again, the members of the

Lincoln brigade quickly lost their manners, and they might also have lost their way if it had not been for the footmarks in the snow which they themselves had made that morning, and for the fact that the road was "blazed" for them, part of the distance, by ax-marks on the trees.

"Old man Sansom says," Abe told them, "that the Injins make blaze marks that a white man can't find—not onless he's lived among 'em an' found out how they do it. He knew a feller once that could read Injin sign, an' he could tell what tribe they belonged to. They skelped him, too, for shootin' some on 'em; but old man Sansom said he reckoned that feller was a good deal more'n even with 'em on skelps."

"Thar's mother!" shouted Matilda, as they drew near the house. "She's been worryin' 'bout us, I know she has. She always does, soon's we're out of her sight. But she needn't do it, not one bit."

Tilly was right, for Mrs. Lincoln had not yet become quite accustomed to the fact that she was in a country where there were almost no roads.

"Oh, dear me!" she had said to herself, "I

s'pose they'll come, safe enough. Wish thar was a good road all the way—both ways, goin' an' comin'. Thar'll be plenty o' roads by an' by. All we have to do is to wait."

She said about the same thing, with even more energy, after they were all in plain sight from where she stood in the doorway, and then it seemed as if she were actually counting them, more than once, to make sure that none of them were missing.

She was made easy on that point soon enough, for each of the returned battalion was eager for his or her opportunity to tell whatever there was to tell about the school, and even Mr. Lincoln himself took an unexpectedly active interest in the several noisily made reports.

CHAPTER IX

THE SUMMER WOODS

INTERRUPTIONS in the course of education would come. Attendance at school in winter could not be entirely regular. Nobody in that settlement, including the schoolmaster himself, expected that it would be. Neither the state of the weather nor the many family affairs were to be depended upon. Even when a splendidly thick and hard crust formed on the snow, after a heavy fall, a first-rate thaw, and a tip-top frost, it proved untrustworthy at the end of a week of good walking. Another thaw came, as is often the case in human affairs. If that crust was both good and bad for the school, however, it was only bad luck for the deer, and enough of them were brought in by the hunters to last during many days. With the operations of the sportsmen Abe and his fellow students had little or nothing to do. On the other hand there

was much corn to be shelled at the Lincoln place, the mortar and pestle were still there, and the pigs provided employment even after they were securely penned in.

Meantime the back door was cut through, the lean-to was up, the windows were better fitted, the new front door was made and hung, and the pool was duly fenced in. Mr. Lincoln and his wife made journeys to the trading-places on the Ohio River, and the claybank horse was made to earn his corn and stable-room. One of the brightest features of the situation was the continual coming of visitors to see Mrs. Lincoln, and the fact that every one of those visits had to be returned in due season. Abe managed to get over to old man Sansom's one afternoon, and had a grand time in spite of the fact that the old historian was out hunting; but that was nothing to the evenings that he spent at his own fireside, when Sansom came over to chat with his friend Tom Lincoln. He might stay pretty late, if everything was all right. His homeward way was now so well marked that he could not lose his way, except in an uncommonly dark night. Such nights, of

course, were to be avoided, and the rising of the moon was to be taken into account as well as the blazes on the trees.

All things went on well at the school. Deportment, spelling, reading, arithmetic were even painfully attended to. Abe himself had not yet advanced so far as writing. Not only was Mr. Dorsey of opinion that it was not well for a boy to plunge into penmanship at so early an age, but there were neither pens nor paper in the Lincoln house. It was enough, and, all things considered, it was a grand achievement that, before spring came and plowing time to break up the winter school altogether, Abe was industriously, if somewhat slowly, picking out, a word at a time, the several stories which belonged to those tremendous pictures in the Bible. Before long he knew them all by heart. He became so accustomed to the story of David and Goliath, however, that even after the snow was gone and he could find stones fit to throw, he entirely forgot his first purpose of practising with a sling to find out how the big Philistine was knocked over.

Plowing time meant a great deal that year.

Mrs. Lincoln was determined that every available acre should be put into corn except the small patch which she reserved for her garden seeds. The soil was new and fertile. There had little been taken from it to wear it out. No harrowing was done, for there was no harrow on the place, but after the land was plowed it was marked off into squares, and every corner of those squares provided work for some boy. At that season the farm required much more work than could be done by one man, and it was well for Mr. Lincoln that he had so many young helpers. Even a small chap like Abe could drop seed-corn on the spots where the hills were to be, and he and the other boys could take turns, with the one hoe in the family, at covering the seed, and afterward in keeping down the intrusive weeds which persisted in coming.

All game was out of season, and there was no good fishing to be had in that vicinity, but the woods themselves were in all their beauty. It was worth any boy's while, whenever he could escape from his hoe and his weeds and his pigs, merely to wander around in the grand old forest, while the leafy can-

opies grew thicker overhead and the mosses and grasses grew greener under foot. It was a good thing to be able to tell one tree from another by its bark and leaves, and to know every animal that dwelt there, including the snakes and porcupines. There did not appear to be many birds. Pigeons came, and crows. There were woodpeckers of several varieties, and a few other birds which were not often seen. The honk of wild geese had been heard away up in the sky, and ducks also had passed on northward, but none of them had alighted in the Lincoln clearing. Neither had an eagle, which had been seen day after day making wide circles far up above the tops of the trees. Abe told Sansom about that eagle.

"Oh, yes, I sighted him," said the old borderer, "or mebbe it was another jest like him. It means that somebody 'round here's got a sick hoss or some other critter. That eagle's waitin' for the carkiss. I learned 'bout that when I was 'way down in the Louisiana country. If thar wasn't a wing to be seen anywhar in the sky an' if thar hadn't been one sighted for a month, you jest let a mule drop dead, an'

'fore you could git away a hundred yards you need but just look up an' you'd see the buzzards comin'. You know they couldn't ha' sighted him, an' they couldn't ha' smelt him, but some on 'em had been a-watchin' of him, an' they knew jest how sick he was. Not one on 'em'll ever come nigh a hull drove o' healthy critters."

Pieces of natural history and border wisdom like that were all the while arriving. It was as if the young people, and Abe in particular among them, were now attending a kind of summer school in which a great many branches were taught, somewhat to the neglect of deportment and manners.

Mr. Lincoln was never out of employment; not even after all his corn was in, and his fences had been mended to keep out the marauding deer. He was the only carpenter to be had for many a long mile, and the only man who owned a whip-saw for the making of plank. He did not exactly earn money, for there was not much of it in circulation, but he could "dicker" for a great many things which his wife wanted, and on the whole they were doing very well. As for the deer, one of Abe's dis-

coveries, in his studies of animals, was how high a fence a beautiful buck or doe will jump if there is a field of tender-leafed, delicious young corn beyond it.

"What I wonder is," he said, "how do they know it's corn? They ain't used to havin' any in the woods. But it a'most looks as if some on 'em knew how to climb. I don't believe any deer really jumped that fence."

Hot days came, when the air was like everybody else, and did not care to stir about or do any work. Storms of rain came, when the hurricanes roared among the trees, and the thunder and lightning broke in awfully upon the dull monotony of the forest life which the settlers were leading. It was at times a genuine relief to stand in the cabin doorway and wonder whether or not there had any trees been blown down.

"I jest do hope thar's been some knocked over," remarked Abe on one of these occasions. He was not in the house, but looking out from the pole-shelter, and he added, "It'd save Pop heaps o' work, an' he says a harricane mostly picks out the trunks

that are beginnin' to dry. What did old man Sansom mean when he said it was jest so with men? The rotten ones tumbled."

"That's so," replied John Johnston. "I found one yesterday that'd been cut down by lightnin', an' it was so holler that I crawled into it like I was a b'ar. It would hide a feller, but I wouldn't keer to sleep in that kind o' place all winter."

It was a good growing year, as all the settlers and their crops were ready to testify, and every now and then good Mrs. Lincoln would look at Abe from head to foot and remark:

"I do declar', how that boy is growin'! He's as tall as most boys o' twelve, if he isn't more; only he's so awful thin an' lanky. One'd think he didn't git enough to eat—an' goodness knows what his appetite is!"

All other occupations were slackened up for him and his companions at the recurring berry times, and then there was fun. The fallen trees of other years, wherever they were crumbling, appeared to have tumbled for the distinct purpose of having wild raspberry vines spring up and climb over

them. Besides these were the strawberries that came first, then the blackberries and afterward the whortleberries, wintergreen berries, elderberries, and some others which were to be let alone because of their bad reputation as being possibly poisonous. It was when he was coming home from berrying one day that Abe met old man Sansom near a fence corner, and the bearded veteran was looking at something that he held in his hand.

"Abe," he said, "do you know what that is?"

"Red clover," said Abe. "Reckon everybody knows clover."

"Do they?" said Sansom. "Wal, mebbe they do, but the Injins themselves didn't use to know it. Thar wasn't a mite of it in this country till the settlers kem in. Then, pretty soon, the Injins caught sight on it. It had been fetched in on some man's waggin that had had hay on it—hayseed, ye know. An' all the redskins hated it like pisen, for they called it 'The White Man's Foot.' They said it meant that they was to be crowded out pretty soon. They were right about it, too, for thar was never an acre o' land give back to 'em after the red clover

got a good start onto it. For along with the clover kem a lot o' men with rifles, an' I'm only afeard that the deer an' turkeys'll go after a bit, jest as the Injins did. What I s'pose we'll have to do 'fore long is to raise our own turkeys; but it's on my mind that we wouldn't do well with deer nor painters."

The summer passed, as all summers will, one after another, and corn-harvest came, bringing with it a severe affliction to Abe and the boys. He was as tall as either of them, and to him, somehow, came the first declaration that he was tall enough to pull corn, even if he had to reach up for it or to bend down some of the mightier stalks. Any cutting which was to be done by a strong arm and a heavy cutlass-like corn-knife, required a grown man, but mere shucking might be performed by smaller workmen. It was just so with the business of tossing the ears from the field heaps into the wagon, which was borrowed from old man Sansom, and again from that wagon into the rail corn-cribs. Considering the increased size of the family, it was well that the crop was liberal. This time the white, flint part of it was carefully pitched into a separate

crib of its own. It might have been said, however, that whenever the boys looked at that crib it reminded them not only of hominy, cakes, and pone, but also of the weary hours of shelling which were surely before them in the future.

The hunting season came with the ripening corn, but it did not come for Abe. Instead of any splendid strolls through the autumn woods after deer, catamounts, or bears, there was to be more scholarship, for the dreaded announcement was made that Mr. Dorsey had not run away and was to reopen his academy over on Little Pigeon Creek. Mrs. Lincoln insisted that all the children should begin with the opening of the school, except the half-time days, which were allowed them for the pleasure of husking corn now and then, and they all went. On the whole, they took it well and patiently, and they did so partly because they knew that all the other scholare would have reports to make as to what had happened to them during so long a vacation. As to that, it was about as they expected during the out-of-door hours of their first week at the schoolhouse; but Dennis Hanks got into a fight with one

boy, who crowed over him too much because his own father had killed a bear, and neither Mr. Lincoln nor any other settler had as yet accomplished so much this season.

The Lincoln cabin was now in pretty good condition, differing greatly within and without from the miserable coop in which Dennis and Nancy and Abe had waited for the coming of their new mother. All the improvements were due to her, and so was the praise that she had not shown any kind of favoritism to her own children, whom she had brought there with her, over the forlorn young savages she came to take care of. These were now appearing about as well as any other young frontiersmen, boys or girls, and they had made a little society of their own in which, crowded as they were, there was no danger that any member of it would feel at all lonely. In fact, even Mr. Tom Lincoln sometimes complained that his house was almost too lively for comfort; but when old man Sansom came over to spend an evening on history, he roundly asserted that there was not a finer, ruggeder lot of youngsters in all those woods—especially Abe.

It was to be understood, as a strong mark of his approval of the manner in which they had listened to him, that one Saturday afternoon he brought with him a present of a fine mastiff pup of his own raising, which had already developed a remarkable growl of its own.

"I wouldn't give a cent," he said, "for a dog that can't growl. You see, it shows that thar ain't no spunk into him. What I keer for is a dog that can growl all over an' make the ha'r rise on the top of his back. I had a dog once that could pull down a wild steer, an' he liked the fun o' doin' it, too; but one o' the critters horned him right through the head an' that was the last o' him—killed him dead as a stone. But that pup'll do well if you fetch him up right, for a pup is jest like a boy, an' you can't begin too early with him. I did, for I cut off all but 'bout two inches of his tail, first thing."

The pup was made to feel at home immediately, and it shortly began to appear as if there were seven children in the house instead of six. Like his companions, the seventh and youngest showed signs of increasing intelligence, but his interest in Dor-

sey's school could be inferred only from the fact that he was always out beyond the wood-pile waiting at the hour for the return of the daily procession, weather or no weather. All through that winter he and the rest grew rapidly in knowledge and in size, but neither the mastiff pup nor any of the other young people shot upward so remarkably as did Abe himself.

"I do declar'," exclaimed his mother, after a careful inspection of him, "he's gained a good two inches! He grows right along out o' anything I can put onto him. But he's beginnin' to read first-rate, an' old Dorsey says he's at the head of the boys' class in spellin', but thar's one o' the older gals that can spell him down. Mebbe she can, mebbe she can't. You needn't take all that Hazel Dorsey says for gospil truth."

There had been pork to sell at killing time, and even much corn to spare. Sansom's wagon had to be borrowed more than once. Therefore there was now on hand a larger amount than formerly of the supplies which might be called luxuries, like sugar and coffee and tea. Besides these, Mrs. Lincoln had

insisted upon obtaining a number of articles of clothing for herself and the girls, not to speak of the increasing demands of the boys for more extensive buckskins. That part of her supplies, however, did not come from the stores at the landings. It did not cost money, but dicker, for old man Sansom fairly delighted in tanning as many skins as he could obtain, and Tom Lincoln and others were eager to oblige him with all the proceeds of their hunting.

"Fact is," remarked Sansom, "thar won't never be any kind o' cloth made that's quite ekil, all things considered, to the nat'ral coat of a wild critter. I knowed a man once that never'd put on in winter anythin' but b'arskin; an' he moved out o' Tennessee an' squatted 'way down in Arkansaw 'cause b'ar was gittin' scurse; an' he got all chawed up in a fight with a grizzly one day an' that was the end of him!"

After all that he might feel disposed to say, there was one serious defect in the kind of dry-goods he was praising. The palefaces had never acquired the art with which the Indian squaws will tan deerskin so that it will not shrink on wetting.

All garments made from such material as old man Sansom provided might as well be made several sizes too large, in the first place, in order that after the weather exposure they were sure to receive they might narrow down to something like a fit. It was on this account that Mrs. Lincoln found two difficulties in the way of her efforts at making Abe look decent: one was the growth of the boy himself; the other was that his successive buckskins, of their own accord, pretty soon began to put on an air of being on a hunt after some smaller boy, for whom they had been getting ready. As for moccasins, there was a deal of ready-made economy about them, for nobody in all that settlement dreamed of going otherwise than barefooted, except in winter weather or to meeting.

"Fact is," said old man Sansom, when presenting that subject, "I've worn leather shoes a good many times—high-leg boots, too; but I never quite got used to 'em, except one long-top pair that I had in the War of 1812. I found 'em on the battle-field the day after we whipped Gineral Pack'num an' the redcoats. I reckoned some feller'd pulled 'em off

so he could run better, an' they fitted me within less'n an inch all 'round the foot. They wore me nine years, for I never put 'em on if I could help it, an' I most ginerally could. If you want a pair o' boots or shoes to last, you oughtn't to walk 'round in 'em onless it's needful. Jest ile 'em well an' hang 'em up, an' they'll keep."

Abe did not get any leather shoes to try experiments with, but he made up his mind that he would surely do so some day. It already was an evident promise of that far-off future that he would then have to call for the largest sizes, for his feet were advancing beyond the rest of his growth.

There were fine snow-storms that winter, and several of them were of a depth of snowfall which almost shut up the Dorsey academy. It took Mr. Lincoln a whole day, with a wooden shovel, to cut a road through one of those drifts between the house and the pigs and corn-cribs. During all that time the plaintive cries of the hungry animals could be heard at the house, and the sympathy expressed for them was also continuous.

"Hear em!" said Mrs. Lincoln. "Jest think o'

the children tryin' to git to school! They won't, for days an' days."

"Jest so," said her husband. "An' the wust of it is that we're keepin' them two ponies for Sansom, an' they'll die o' thirst if they don't git a drink. Glad it isn't quite so bad between this an' the pool, but it's a good thing for us that all the barr'ls are full."

"Nonsense!" replied his wife; "we can always melt snow enough for all the water we need, so long's the wood-pile holds out an' thar are trees nigh enough for choppin'. Thar are wuss things than snow-water."

After all, the first help the pigs received was from Abe and Dennis and John, for the boys floundered over the big drift and threw out corn until all the squealing ceased.

CHAPTER X

HORSE-DEALING

NO winter can last forever, and there was an end of that one, but all through its days of snow and nights of frost yet another improvement had been preparing. It did not come suddenly, and it was not fully completed until it was nearly time for the spring plowing to begin. Some of the new settlers that had been hoped for arrived first, and there were rumors that a gathering of houses over on Little Pigeon Creek was to be a village before long, and that it would have a name of its own.

"Yes, 'bout that," said Mr. Tom Lincoln. "I did hear that if old man Gentry made his store anythin' like what it ort to be, most likely the town'd be called Gentryville, an' one name's as good as another."

"Tom," replied his wife, "never mind 'bout that

jest now. What I want to know is what old man Sansom's gwine to do 'bout the hosses. Can't you make him come to some kind o' agreement?"

"Sally," said he, "fact is, I believe Bob Sansom's nigh right 'bout his father. He says the old man jest loves to raise hosses, an' he's allers ready for a trade, but it does jest about kill him to let one hoss go from him without gittin' another hoss o' some kind back in the swop. I haven't anythin' to swop with, an' thar's whar the shoe pinches."

The subject had been brought up frequently ever since the first borrowing of the claybank. Mrs. Lincoln had calculated that he and some of Sansom's ponies which had taken their turns in the pole-shelter, whether or not there had been any use for them, at the time of their residence (in that barn by way of a kindness done to a neighbor) had eaten their heads off several times over, if there had been any fair price offering for unshelled corn on the Indiana market.

"You see, Tom," the old man had remarked, as he sat by the Lincoln fireplace and smoked, "thar's a great deal to be said 'bout hosses. It isn't easy,

jest offhand, to say what they're wuth. I had a hoss once that I traded six times, an' I allers made somethin' on him. He was dead sure to come back. An' then I'd trade another hoss, to settle the matter an' make a new deal. Any man was glad to let me have that hoss an' git another in place of him. He was a good one, too. Thar wasn't a fault in him that'd show under a week or ten days, an' then he'd let out what was in him, an' he'd keep it up till they fetched him home an' said the devil was in him."

Nevertheless, when the grass was greening and the buds were swelling on the trees, old man Sansom one morning met Abe leading the claybank along the road, and looking somewhat dejected.

"Abe," said he, "whar are ye gwine with that hoss?"

"Over to your house," replied Abe mournfully. "Thar was a man kem from one o' the new clearin's, an' he was talkin' with mother. He had the likeliest kind of a critter that he didn't know what to do with."

"Abe," exclaimed the old man, "you jest face about an' trot home. I'll go an' see your mother.

Why, I'd done sold that nag to Tom. All thar was left to 'range was somethin' 'bout the gray pony an' some carpenter work an' jest odds an' ends o' things. It's his hoss now, an' he needn't hunt for another trade this season. Some o' the critters these new settlers are fetchin' in ain't wuth much, nohow."

Not a great many minutes later he and Abe were at the Lincoln front door, face to face with the lady manager, who had determined to try her hand at a horse-trade and see if she could not bring the negotiations to a finish.

"What I was thinkin' of," she said to Sansom, "was that you seemed to set store by that one, an' that I'd jest as lieve have one that was four or five years younger an' that was raised in Kentucky."

"Why, bless your soul," he replied politely, "that's jest whar he was raised! Best stock in the kentry. An' he's younger than he looks. I've known hosses o' that breed to keep on as good as ever till they was over thirty. An' I saw one once at forty, an' he could pull down a fence or open a barn door then. Thar's Tom comin' now, an' we can

fix the matter right up. He can go on with his plowin', but he'd best go over to Gentryville an' git a job o' carpenter work on Gentry's new store. It'll help him pay for the pony, an' that's what fetched me over here to-day, for I want to trade for some o' Gentry's tools an' things."

That was it. In an unexpected way the main obstacle had been removed, for it leaked out in that very hour that Sansom had already been dickering with Gentry for a second horse trade, into which this might be made to work profitably. Here, therefore, was not to be merely a miserable out-and-out sale of a horse, but a series of long-winded bargains such as his soul delighted in. Abe led away the claybank to the pole-shelter with a yet higher respect for his mother and a determination that he would shortly go and see the new town, if it was really there.

The next morning he was missed, and not a soul could give any idea what had become of him, although search was made, with ample shouting of his name all around the clearing. He was not to be found, and his absence without leave might have

made trouble for him if it had not been for some collateral considerations. The first of these was that the plowed ground was not yet quite ready for corn-planting; the next was, that he had gone on an exploring expedition. Yet another might have been good or bad for him, according to circumstances. He was gone all day, and even his father became anxious about him, and went and cut a long, limber switch by way of expressing his feelings. At last it was very near sunset, when John Johnston and Dennis Hanks met him coming in on the farther side of the open.

"Hallo!" they shouted; and Dennis added, "Whar've you been?" and John exclaimed, "Oh, but won't you ketch it! You'll be jest hided."

"Been to Gentryville!" shouted back Abe. "Saw all thar was to see."

"Why didn't you tell us fellers, an' let us go 'long with you?" yelled John; and Dennis grumbled: "That was jest torn down mean!"

"Wal," said Abe, "the notion took me last night, an' it ketched me ag'in at the pool this mornin', an' I jest snaked it an' went."

"What did you see, anyhow?" asked John. "Wish I could ha' gone."

"Didn't see nothin' much," responded Abe, and he appeared to be inclined to silence as he hurried on toward the house.

In a few minutes more he was replying to a similar question from Mrs. Lincoln while she was hugging him, and while his father was slowly drawing the switch through the fingers of his left hand.

"Oh, Abe!" she had said, "Gentryville! An' how you have scared us! But what did you see? Did you git anythin' new? How does it look?"

The switch was drawing a little more slowly, as Abe could see out of a corner of one eye, and he quickly replied:

"Wal, it's jest about nothin', 'cept some houses an' a lot o' folks. I asked one feller whar the town was, an' he said it was comin', but it hadn't got in yet. He said old Sol Gentry forgot it this trip, an' left it behind him over on the Wabash. Then he said it was to be a new kind o' town, an' thar wasn't gwine to be any small boys 'lowed into it. He said thar was to be a hog-reeve 'pinted to kill 'em all off."

"What else did he tell ye?" demanded Mr. Lincoln, with the switch lowered as if it might be waiting for the answer to that question.

Mrs. Lincoln dropped a skillet that she had picked up, and John and Dennis grinned at the switch and at each other, but Abe went on:

"I was jest about sayin' somethin' back at him when a big chap kem along with a club in one hand an' a rifle in the other, an' hooted right into his ear. Then he collared him an' jerked him off his feet."

"Was thar a fight?" shouted Mr. Lincoln, letting the switch find a resting-place on the floor, close beside the skillet. "Did he kill him?"

"No, Pop, he didn't kill him," said Abe, "but he had to knock him endways 'fore he'd give in. He told the folks that this feller was wanted down the river for hoss-stealin', an' thar was a big gang of them, an' that folks 'round hereaway'd better be all on the lookout for thar critters, 'specially o' dark nights."

"Tom," exclaimed Mrs. Lincoln, "we must look sharp for ours, now we've got 'em. Oh, I'm so glad

Sansom give us that pup! We can tie him in the stable. He can bark like anythin', an' I'll be sure to hear."

"Wal, if I ain't torn down glad he went!" said Mr. Lincoln emphatically. "Thieves are bound to come whar thar's critters. No, Abe, you eat your supper, but do you jest go right on an' tell all you saw at Gentryville. I reckon thar's enough o' the town got in, an' the rest of it's comin'."

Abe was a good deal more than ready to obey. As he did so, it quickly became apparent that the arrest of the marauder had set all the unemployed men and women in the village to spinning yarns on the spot. In fact, some who had previously been at work lost all interest in their other occupations and joined the mob of historians with thrilling contributions of their own. These were many and of all sorts, but not one tale of a lost quadruped had been told in Abe's hearing without his becoming an entirely competent reporter thereof. It was as if something in his head were playing stenographer and taking it all down in shorthand. Before the evening's entertainment was over he had added to

the Gentryville list a number of things which he had heard at Sansom's. All the reports and records being put together, it was evident that organized gangs, as well as solitary horse-thieves, had for a long time been recognized features of frontier life. It was as if the taking of four-footed plunder were as a local custom which had been handed down from the heroes of the vanished Indian tribes, all of whom were known to glory in that kind of skill, with its daring adventures and hardly won successes. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were entirely absorbed, and neither Dennis nor John could have given the smallest idea of the manner in which they envied Abe that trip of his to Gentryville.

It was almost a necessary consequence of the arrest of a horse-thief in presence of Abe that he and his father, one on the claybank and the other on the pony, rode over to old man Sansom's early next morning. The news was important; its discussion was necessary. The reception of it by the old horse-raiser and his family was every bit as enthusiastic as they could have expected reasonably, for all the men on the place at once went and took down their

rifles, to make sure the weapons were in good order for use.

Abe himself went out for an inspection of the stock as soon as he could after dismounting from his pony. It occurred to him that any gang of proposed horse-thieves would be likely to come after that enticing collection. "They'd jest gobble 'em, too," he said to himself, "if it wasn't for thar bein' so many dogs an' guns around. All those pups, big an' little'd wake up every soul on the place if they'd let all their mouths off together. Some on 'em can jest howl! I've heard 'em. Good biters, too."

He may have missed some of old man Sansom's horse stories by lingering as long as he did among the stables, but he did not fail of obtaining one piece of information which was of interest to him. He was thinking of it seriously, but it was not until he and his father had remounted and were on their way home that Mr. Lincoln turned suddenly to say:

"Abe, Sansom tells me that old man Locker has got his hand-mill into shape ag'in at his place, over beyond the south timber. It's a good, straight road, an' you can find it easy. Thar's plenty o' corn,

ready shelled, an' you boys can shell a heap more. You an' Dennis can take both o' the hosses to-morrer, while I'm carpentering at Gentry's, an' you can tote a big grist to be ground. We're nigh out o' meal."

"That's jest what I'd like to do!" exclaimed Abe. "I saw a grist-mill once down in Kentucky, but I didn't go inside, an' I don't know what it's like. That one was run by a mill-pond an' a big wheel."

"This one isn't," said his father. "You'll see, when you git thar."

That did not prevent him from asking questions of his mother when he got home. Nobody, anywhere, had as yet dreamed of a steam-power mill, but she could tell him a number of interesting things about water-power and horse-power. The latter was commonly the beginning of grindings all over the world, so that in after days the efficiency of milling inventions, of whatever kind, came to be calculated according to the estimated or supposed number of the animals they took the work away from. It has never yet been discovered what precise horse,

large or small, weak or strong, was originally selected to measure power by.

Home was reached and all was duly arranged. It was necessary for the boys to be off at an early hour next morning, in order that the corn might reach the mill as soon as possible after the power to be employed might be supposed to have finished his breakfast.

"I do hope," said Mrs. Lincoln, "that not too many others'll be in the mill ahead o' ye. If you find thar are too many grists waitin', you'd better leave your'n an' come home an' make another trip for it."

The claybank and the pony were bridled and led to the door. Then Abe on the broad deck and Dennis on the smaller craft were put on board first. The rest of the cargo, in large sacks, was hoisted before and behind them, wedging them in so that no amount of shying or rearing by the beasts could unseat them. A wagon would have been somewhat better, but as yet the Lincoln outfit did not include any wheels.

It was only six or seven miles to the Locker

place, even by the winding way which led to it through the woods. The miles were passed, and just as the two mill-boys rode out from under the forest shadows the claybank suddenly stood still. It was as if he saw something which interested or even startled him. The gray pony followed his example, but neither of them said anything. The boys also were entirely silent observers for a few moments, and then Abe burst out with:

"Denny, if thar isn't the mill! Jest look at him a-grindin'."

There it was, indeed—a large, open shed, a mere roof, under the center of which the millstones had been set up. There was more machinery outside of the stones and their casing, but the most prominent feature of the whole contrivance was a long, outreaching beam on one side, at the outer end of which a short, fat man was walking and pushing, and he was the power which was compelling the stones to whirl around as they were now doing.

"Some other feller's in ahead of us," said Dennis. "It's goin'."

"That isn't jest what I was thinkin' of," replied

'Abe. "Don't you remember what mother was readin' to us about Samson? The Philistines pulled his eyes out, an' stuck him in a hand-mill an' made him grind corn for 'em. Thar's a big picter of it in her Bible, an' I went for a look at it yesterday. I read the story all the way through. That thar looks a good deal like the picter does. But I kind o' reckon Samson was wuth a heap more in any mill than old man Locker is."

"Wal," said Dennis, "I heard it, an' that wasn't the hull on it. Samson got even with 'em. He pulled thar old meetin'-house right down onto them while thar was preachin' goin' on, an' it was full. Killed loads on 'em. Served 'em right, too, for blindin' of him the way they did."

"That isn't all," said Abe. "He was a heap more'n even with 'em 'fore they put him in the mill. He mashed 'em with a bone. I asked old man Sansom how it was, an' he said he saw a mule skeleton once, an' a jawbone of it was as long's your arm; it'd make an awful club. Let's go ahead."

As they did so the mill stopped running and the power of it came forward to meet them. He was a

strong old fellow, for he lowered the sacks of grain with almost as little effort as Tom Lincoln might have used. Then he relieved Abe's anxiety about the grist he was grinding.

"It's all right, my boy," he said. "When nothin' else is in I grind my own corn. That's how I have meal on hand to trade with to fellers that's in a hurry. I can stop it off now an' put in your'n."

"How long'll it take?" asked Abe. "Can we have it to-day?"

"Course you can!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Why, bless your soul, I can grind fifteen bushels a day in that mill if I'm put to it! Ornarily, though, ten bushel is all I call for. I don't keer to work myself to death for any man. You boys can run 'round anywhar you please till dinner-time; then you'll hear the horn at the house, an' come in."

Dennis was ready to inspect everything about the place without delay, but Abe was in a manner fascinated by that mill. He stood and watched all the operations of the miller. He saw some of his own corn put in, saw the meal from it coming out below, and then he studied the ingenious mechanism

by means of which the same power that turned the stones also rattled the bolting-cloth which was sifting other meal in a carefully weather-guarded corner of the shed.

"That's a big thing, isn't it?" said Mr. Locker proudly. "It saves all sorts o' trouble for the women-folks. They used to have to sift thar own meal out, but now they won't. It's a great improvement."

He leaned against his beam, and it walked slowly away with him while he talked to Abe about other mills, better and worse, and asserted:

"'Fore next winter I'm goin' to have this mill walled in so I can run it in any kind o' weather, onless it's too tarnation cold. I ain't a-goin' to freeze myself to death for any man."

He was not so determined a story-teller as old man Sansom, but he did pretty well, and it was long before Abe went to join Dennis. They looked around at cattle and hogs and horses, but it was not a great while before they were startled by a burst of sound which came from the house.

"Horn!" shouted Dennis. "Did you ever hear anythin' like that?"

"It means dinner," said Abe. "But what's he blowin' like that for?"

Old man Locker himself stood in the doorway, and he was sending out blast after blast, but there did not appear to be anybody sent for or arriving except the boys. No, he did not expect anybody else, and he was exerting his lungs in this manner solely for the pride and pleasure that he took in that tremendous curve of black ox-horn.

The dinner was a good one, and while it was progressing Mr. Locker explained to his young customers the differences between fine meal, coarse meal, samp and hominy grits. Nevertheless, he appeared to eat in some haste, as if he were eager to return to his imitation of Samson. When he did so, the meal ran out as if Philistines were driving him, and in due season the sacks were on the pony and the claybank.

"Takin' out the cobs makes 'em smaller," said Abe; and away they went homeward, but he was troubled by a curious idea that there was some kind of mill-wheel running in his own head.

CHAPTER XI

THE COUNTRY STORE

OUR corners," he said. "That makes two streets. The village is mostly scattered all along 'em. Mother says that thar'll be sidewalks one o' these days. Thar might be now, if folks didn't like the middle o' the road better'n the sides. Reckon old Gentry's new store cost him a pile."

It must have done so, for it was coated all over with planed boards which came from south of the Ohio River. Moreover, these were now in process of being painted white. This was a tremendous piece of extravagance, and the stately building itself was actually two stories high. It would easily contain all the goods which were likely to be called for by all the population settling within reach of it for years to come. There it stood, on the southeasterly corner of the crossroads. and on the op-

posite corner northward was Mr. Gentry's barn. This was large, for there was at least a half dozen of it, of various shapes and sizes, but none of it was of any other architecture or material than log-work. The several stables and cribs and pens were scattered over more than an acre of ground, testifying in this way to the liberal character of their owner's mind and pocketbook. Across the road, westward, was Jim Allen's blacksmith shop. On the other of the four corners was the as yet unpainted frame residence of an important man by the name of Josiah Crawford. With due politeness to that part of it which was just under the roof, Crawford's mansion might be called a story and a half, but not two stories.

"The village is growin'," remarked Abe, without moving from his place of observation under the shadow of Gentry's front barn; "but this is the first time I've seen that store since the roof was on."

It was evidently making a strong impression upon him, but at that moment he was hailed sonorously by a new arrival on horseback.

"Hallo, Abe! I say, come an' hold this hoss

while I go over to the shop. Jim Allen's been tinkerin' my rifle, an' I want to see whether he's gone an' sp'iled the lock. The old screw wouldn't grip the flint hard enough to make it strike fire, an' it's jest awful to have your flint drop when you pull trigger on a buck. I knew a man once that had his life saved that way, an' it made a pious man of him. He stopped swearin' an' drinkin'. You'd best keep a tight hand on that hoss, or he'll be walkin' right on into the store, like he meant to buy somethin'. I haven't had him long, an' I don't exackly know what he won't do next."

Old man Sansom was on the ground long before his remarks were concluded, and Abe had the pony by the bit, gently restraining the animal's apparent tendency to rear with all four of his feet at the same time. His efforts were only fairly successful, but the net result of them was by no means altogether desirable. In less than a minute after his master disappeared through the ample doorway of the smithy, the restive dancer had brought Abe almost into the store itself. At the threshold, however, both of them came to a standstill, and the boy and

the beast stared silently into the place of business. For the first time in his life that pony saw a man laying out calico on a counter, for a bevy of admiring women to criticize and test with eyes and fingers. He could hear their remarks, too, and so could Abe. They were telling each other, and Mr. Gentry behind the counter, about the wonderful dry-goods they had seen in other times and at other places. Costly! Splendid! Too fine altogether for the present requirements of the sensible people of southern Indiana.

"Tell ye what, Mr. Gentry," said one of them, older than the rest, "if craps are good this season an' next, you don't know what goods you may have to fetch on. Some o' the gals are awful extravagant nowadays."

"It was jest so when I was a gal," began the woman who was standing next to her, with a yard of red calico displayed over one arm, but at that moment the pony interrupted her with a loud neigh, and let fly a kick which upset an empty barrel that was standing outside of the doorway.

Abe shouted "Whoa!" and hung bravely to the

bridle, but the pony wheeled around and stood with his face to the street, as if he were entirely disgusted by the unhaylike appearance of all that he had seen in the new store. He was also exhibiting signs of a vicious disposition to back, and one of the women screamed excitedly:

"Oh! look at that hoss! He's gwine to rare in!"

"Hold onto him, Abe!" roared another and louder voice. "Jim hadn't finished sp'ilin' the rifle, but I got back a rope halter I'd left thar, an' I'll hitch him to Si Crawford's hitchin'-post, an' I reckon he won't make out to pull it up. If he does, I'll have to pay for the post. I've got him! Come along, now, you black rascal! What did ye want into that thar store? I knew a hoss, once——"

There he ceased speaking, for the pony was neighing close to his ear, as he yielded to the pressure of the rope halter and followed its influence across the street. Abe was therefore unhorsed, and he walked on into the store as far as the nearest counter. There he halted, and gazed rapidly around in all directions, even at the ceiling, from which many articles of bright tin and pewter ware, with

some of iron which were not so bright, were suspended low enough for inspection by possible customers. There were shelves at the sides, behind both of the counters, and on them were many varieties of merchandise. He saw open-topped boxes, also, which appeared to contain sugar and coffee and salt, not mixed at all, but each article in a separate box by itself. It took him but a moment to ascertain that the store presented for sale all sorts of agricultural implements likely to be called for, with harness for horses, and boots and shoes for men and women. The crockery and queensware bewildered him a little, there was so much of it all. He was just beginning to think painfully concerning worldly wealth when Mr. Gentry himself shouted out:

"Abe, glad you came. I was just wishing for a boy. You take these parcels and carry them out to Mrs. Harriman's wagon; then hurry back, and I'll have something more for you to do. Step lively, now!"

This was not by any means Abe's first acquaintance with the merchant, and he obeyed with alac-

rity. Of all the things, however, which he could have thought of as unlikely to come to him, but that pleased him well, was the idea thus put before him of becoming in any manner associated with that magnificent commercial enterprise. Something like a shower of warm water seemed to pour over him as he accepted his momentary association with the new store. He took the parcels and carried them out with a vague idea that he himself had somehow sold the goods to Mrs. Harriman, and that he was to sell a lot more as soon as he should be better settled in his business, with an improved knowledge of merchandise and prices. It was all as yet a trifle dreamy, and he was stirred out of possible hallucinations as he was turning away from the wagon, for old man Sansom had hitched the pony and was half-way across the street.

"Abe," he thundered, "it's all right! I didn't know that Gentry had hired ye. I knowed he wanted a boy, for that thar son o' his'n had ruther do 'most anythin' else than 'tend store, onless thar was to be all the while nothin' but gals to trade with. An' your folks have got too many in the house for com-

fort, an' they'd most likely be glad to git red o' one. I reckon I would, if I had sech a raft on hand."

He might have said more, nobody knows what, but Abe was now disappearing through the doorway of his place of business, if that was what it was, and Mr. Gentry was shouting at him another errand, all ready to be attended to. He was a tall, slender man, with a clean-shaven face that day, and exceedingly polite manners for that occasion. It was not entirely unknown to Abe, however, that the shaving of his face was done regularly on Sunday mornings, and that one of the griefs of his life was the marvelous rapidity with which his whiskers and beard would grow. Toward the end of each week, to his sorrow, his long, lean face was sure to present the idea of a stubble-field on which there had been a closely planted crop of black-stemmed grain. In his dress he was fairly particular all the week, out of respect to his customers, but no storm that ever blew could have prevented him from putting on his best black swallow-tailed suit on a Sunday morning, even if he had to stay at home in it.

The main trouble with that establishment, that

day, was its prosperity. It had too many customers and only one salesman. It was all but impossible for the busy merchant to measure calico and weigh out sugar at the same moment. He managed pretty well, nevertheless, with the assistance of his newly arrived thirteen-year-old clerk, although Abe could not as yet be entrusted, of course, with so intricate a matter as the management of weighing-scales which would go as high as fifty pounds. This highly ornamental as well as useful affair sat on a counter, but on the floor, near the door, stood another, with a capacity much more ponderous. Anything like a wagon or a load of hay could not be weighed at any place nearer than one of the Ohio River landings.

It was well for Abe to be kept so busy, or the sudden change in his circumstances might have bewildered him. It surely would have done so if he had all at once taken in the vast idea that this adventure of his was to last for more than one day. He knew that his mother was somewhere in the village, visiting a friend, and he expected that toward night she would come and take him home

with her, in time for the supper which the girls were to cook. He did not fully understand the needs of that business nor the wisdom of his mother. She finished her visit and came to the store, but she did not manifest any astonishment at seeing her son behind a counter. One fact was that she had met old man Sansom. So deeply was he interested that he came in with her, carrying his now completely mended rifle. It was with this long, dangerous-looking weapon that he pointed at Mr. Gentry's new clerk, remarking:

"Thar he is, Mrs. Linkin. I was put into a store once, when I wasn't much older'n he is. But I was real bright, an' so is he, an' I got out ag'in. But he'll git into scrapes with old Gentry, sure's you live. Nobody can git along with him for any length o' time."

"What's that?" laughed Mr. Gentry. "You get out! But about Abe, Mrs. Lincoln, do you mind my keeping him here for a while?"

"Why, no," said she. "I'd kind o' like it. He could sleep at home an' come over here every mornin'."

"Oh no," interrupted Mr. Gentry, "not so bad as that. I want him to sleep in the store, and he can get his meals at my house. He'll have to be up early and sweep out. If it's cold weather—and it soon will be—he will have to start the fire before he gets his breakfast."

"That's what he'll have to do, Mrs. Linkin," put in old man Sansom. "If thar's anythin' in the wide world that Sol Gentry hates, it's gittin' out o' bed in the mornin'. An' he ain't wuth much arter he's out, nohow. Now, Gentry, I want half a pound o' rifle powder, best you've got, that'll go off without holdin' down a coal o' fire on top of it. Thar are some kinds o' gunpowder——"

"Just so!" exclaimed Mr. Gentry. "But if a man doesn't know how to load a gun, and rams down a wad before he puts in his powder——"

"Might a'most as well, with some powder I've seen," said Sansom. "Put a light to it, an' it'll burn steady all day. I want some new flints, too—good ones. Some flints don't seem to have any fire in 'em, nohow. But I had a flint once that'd send out a stream o' sparks long as your

finger. It'd burn a hole right through a piece o' leather——"

"Just so," said Mr. Gentry. "I had a barrel o' that kind o' flints once, but I had to stop keeping 'em. You see, Mrs. Lincoln, it wouldn't do. I had to keep all the time pouring water on them to keep them from taking fire. Might burn down the store, you know."

"Wal," she said, "Abe, do you want to stay?"

"Of course I do!" jumped out of his mouth eagerly. "I can learn all thar is in the store in no time. Keep it right, too."

"Ye-es," said Sansom, "mebbe you can, but I warn ye. Don't put that thar powder-kag down by the fire. An' if you do, don't sit on it. I knew a feller once that tried it on, an' you can't guess how high it lifted him. Wasted all the powder, too."

There might have been more talk if Mrs. Lincoln had not been in haste to get home; but even in that short conversation Abe had begun to get a glimpse of one of the great educational advantages of his new position.

If the term "parliament" means "talking-

place," and it is said to imply something of that kind, then there were two parliaments which were frequently held at Gentry's store. Sometimes both of them met at the same time, but generally only one was in session, at this place or that, according to the circumstances and the weather. If it was warm, or at least not very cold, the doorway and its neighborhood was a favorite locality for the lingering of men who had time to spare. Corn would grow just the same without their watching it. All sorts of passengers on either road were prone to turn toward that doorway, if anybody was to be seen standing there. Generally there would be, for there were men who were willing to stand guard there an hour at a time waiting for chance comers. A shower of rain, or somebody bargaining, might cause the parliament to drift inside and sit on the barrel-heads or the counters, or even on the floor; and there were good commercial reasons why Mr. Gentry was willing to have it so.

As for him, however, considered as a perpetual member, the fact was that no other man in that settlement, not even old man Sansom himself, knew

more yarns and tales of all sorts, or was apparently more fond of telling them, or of hearing other men tell. Sansom, indeed, insisted that Gentry kept a stock of old stories, dried or salted, either down cellar or over in the haymow at the barn, ready to be brought out whenever they were wanted. The real place of deposit, however, was probably nearer than the barn, for his own upper story was always within easy reach.

The other and often the greater parliament was assembled only in cold weather. Its place of meeting was at the back of the store, and here Abe was now to make his first acquaintance with that rare luxury, a stove. Several broad slabs of limestone had been put down to protect the floor, and upon these rested the feet of an enormous, open-faced Franklin, in which, with skill and attention, almost as much wood might be burned as in any fireplace. It had the advantage, however, of giving out more heat than a stick and mud affair could throw, especially after its broad, rusty back became red-hot.

Sunset came, and with it the exciting novelty, to Abe, of going to Mr. Gentry's house for supper.

He managed to go and to get away without having uttered a loud word, so far as he could remember. It was not only that he was somewhat overcome by the presence of strange company, but much more that he was eager to be in the store again and to take part in its illumination for the evening's trade. He had seen a lard lamp at old man Sansom's, and had believed it a big one, but it was a mere child of a lamp when compared with either of the three which Mr. Gentry had brought with him on his last return from Kentucky. It was true that he had bought them second-hand, and that they exhibited signs of antiquity, but they could hold lard enough to make any owner of them wish that pork might be cheap and evenings not too long. Besides these, there were candles which might be employed on occasion and then blown out. There was a lantern for visits to the cellar, and that cave under the store was dark enough to encourage the bringing down of a lantern at any time.

It was a treat to watch Mr. Gentry trim and light a lamp, but he had no show-window to put one in. His lamps were to be suspended from the

ceiling by long brass-gold chains, so that articles of merchandise on the counters or the shelves might, with close inspection, be distinguished from each other. Abe watched with deep interest while they were preparing. Then they were lighted and the store was brilliant.

"Now, Abe," said Mr. Gentry, "I'll go for my supper. When I get back I'll show you something else."

Perhaps he had an insane idea that Abe would be left there all alone, and that he might feel lonely. Perhaps Abe, on the other hand, was expecting to have that vast concern all to himself for a time. If so, both of them were in error. It was as if all the boys and some of the girls of that small community had been on the watch for the departure of the merchant. All of them had been at school with Abe, and word had mysteriously gone around among them that he had been caught and caged and made a clerk of in Gentry's store. If they were at all afraid of that great man, or of his crowds of customers, they had no fears whatever to keep them from pouring in for a stare at his clerk, and for a

torrent of more or less derisive interrogatories. It was of no use, however, for he was as ready as if he had been expecting them to come or had invited them. Besides, he had the advantage of being behind the counter, and none of them dared climb over. There were a few older people who came and were willing to await the return of Mr. Gentry, although Abe appeared to know prices pretty well. Neither they, therefore, nor any of the younger people, purchased a cent's worth. It was all talk and no trade.

There was a reason why Mr. Gentry became willing to be unannoyed by customers for a few minutes, not long after his return. He had seen one of them out into the road, and when he reentered the store he strode at once to the middle of it, faced to the right, and took his silver watch out of his pocket. Before him, on a high shelf against the wall, stood the most treasured jewel of his establishment. It was a large and very white-faced clock, except for fly-specks and age, and there was a slight, rheumatic crook in one of its withered hands. It was this hand first, and then the other, that had to be

moved short distances correctively, before he proceeded carefully to wind up the long-corded weights by means of which the delicate mechanism of that time-keeper was revolved.

"Abe," said Mr. Gentry, "that's exactly the right time." But even while he made that assertion so confidently he was gently moving backward or forward the hands of his watch. "You see," he continued, "I know just how it is. The clock runs a trifle fast. It gains just so much. My watch runs a trifle slow. It loses just so much, every day. When you split the difference, you are sure you have exactly the right time."

CHAPTER XII

THE DEBATES

NO parliament would assemble around the Franklin stove until a fire should blaze in it, but there was a promise of cold weather on the morrow. The last instructions of Mr. Gentry to Abe had reference to this fact.

"Nine o'clock now," he had said, "and you'd better turn in, for you must be up and at work not much after five in the morning. Sweep first, but leave the door unlocked, so that any fellow that comes to trade can get in. If I'm really wanted, come over after me. Make the fire a good one. You can take coals from our kitchen fire at the house."

Abe went to bed, but not before he had thoroughly enjoyed himself at the front door, locking and unlocking it again and again, to see how it worked. It was his first experience with a door-lock. The bolts also, there and at the back door,

were objects of interest; they were such splendid examples of human ingenuity. Besides, the very windows of that store were provided with fastenings of a remarkable character.

"Thar's a heap o' things here wuth stealin'," he said to himself, "and old man Sansom says you can't always tell who's a robber an' who isn't. He said he hunted for a week once with an entire stranger, an' didn't find out he was a thief till one mornin' he woke up an' found he was alone in the woods without any rifle or bullet-pouch, an' he never sighted that chap ag'in. Gentry says thar ain't any thieves hereabouts, but it's his duty not to put temptation in any man's way."

In a few minutes more Abe was sound asleep, but with an anxiety floating around in his mind as to how he was to be sure of waking and getting to work anywhere near five o'clock next morning. He was not half sure of being able to do so, but he was to have unexpected help. He had been asleep less than an hour when he suddenly found himself sitting up and rubbing his head, which he had bumped against the counter above his bunk.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "what's that? If it isn't that clock! I heard it go off yesterday, but it didn't make such a racket then."

He was young yet, and had never learned that any clock which can strike at all can create its best din in the silence of the night, although it may seem to hammer gently in the daytime. As for Mr. Gentry's clock, it was an uncommonly powerful gong-hitter. It appeared to be even reluctant to give it up after having struck its appointed number.

"Ten," said Abe. "Now I can go to sleep again. Reckon I won't jump in that way the next time—not now I know what it is."

He was mistaken. He bumped his head again at eleven. He did not do so quite so severely at twelve. At one he did but awake and roll over. Two, three, four, made him open his eyes unfailingly, but when five was banged he lay still only until he had counted the strokes.

"Thar!" he exclaimed, as he rolled out of the bunk. "I'll sweep first. Then for some coals, and I'll have a fire in no time."

One long look at the gaping mouth of the Frank-

lin changed his purpose on that point. The door-locks and bolts were attended to and the store was opened for either thieves or customers. He took a shovel with him, and the kitchen door of the Gentry house was also found open. Ashes were scraped in the fireplace. Red-hot coals in plenty were taken, and then he was quickly in the store again. Not long afterward the entire place was full of smoke, while the Franklin and the chimney were coming to an agreement on the subject of a draft. They did agree shortly, and it was just grand to see how blazing hickory could work the iron invention of the great philosopher of whom Abe somewhat loosely asserted that "he went an' discovered a new kind o' lightnin'."

He could not linger to admire the stove and the fire, for he now had before him the genuine enjoyment of handling a first-class broom-corn broom. There had never been one in the Lincoln cabin until the arrival of its present mistress. When one did come it had been a subject of almost jealous contention among the girls. They only had been instructed in the artistic uses of it, and the boys had been

compelled to let it alone. This was wise, for a really well-made broom will last a long time with careful handling and with only one floor to sweep. The floor of the store was not exceedingly extensive. It was swept, and Abe was ready to go over to the house for breakfast as soon as Mr. Gentry arrived to take charge of things. Not a solitary customer had yet turned up, but one might come in at any moment, and the merchant took out his watch to compare its time with the clock.

"Keeping together pretty well," he said of them, and added: "But I needn't put on too much fire just now. I'd as lief it'd be a little cold in the front of the store. I reckon ice was made in the creek last night."

Abe found it cold and clear when he went out, but it was little he cared for the weather. More important by far than that were clocks and Franklin stoves and miscellaneous merchandise. Thoughts of these things may also have been in the minds of his family at home, for by the middle of the forenoon his father had come to see what he was doing.

Mr. Lincoln walked into the store, and all the

way back to the end of it, exploringly, as a number of his fellow citizens had done before him. Then he came forward again and stood still to stare at his tall, slim son tying up a parcel behind a counter.

"Wal, Abe," he said, "this is what your mother did with your 'rithmetic an' readin'. I didn't reckon anythin' 'd come of it as soon as this."

He was pleased that it had come, however, and he went away contented after an examination of the lock of his rifle, to be sure it was in good condition if needed for a deer on his way home.

Customers were coming in, and every soul of them went to the rear of the store for a long look at the great stove and the fire. Three men and four women came in before long, with Mr. Josiah Crawford. One of the men was Jim Allen, the blacksmith, with a nailrod in one hand and a small hammer in the other, and Abe heard a woman say to him:

"It's all right, Jim, as fur as it goes, but it'll make things awful cold in the front o' the store. All the cold that gits in here'll jest be druv forrid. Why, I could feel it when I kem in."

Abe shortly afterward found for that woman precisely the kind of brown sugar she wanted, but Mr. Gentry came to weigh it out for her, while all of Abe's fingers were tingling to get hold of those weights and scales. The weighing was a promotion, a kind of shoulder-straps and feathers, which had not yet been conferred upon him. Dennis Hanks and John Johnston arrived before noon, but it was not until later in the day that his mother came in, attended by all three of the girls. Of the three, it was evident that Nancy was several pegs the proudest, and they and Mrs. Lincoln sailed back for a look at the fire. Mrs. Lincoln was interested deeply in the clock.

"If I live an' do well," she said, "I'm gwine to have one o' them things in my own house one o' these days."

She was just the woman to fulfil her purposes, but at present her clocks and other luxuries were far away in the dim future. So it is with many of the best of people; but Abe was wishing that he could take that midnight hammerer right down from the wall and give it to her. "Reckon I could

wake up in the mornin' without it," he said to himself.

It was not until after dark that the deep wisdom of Mr. Gentry became fully manifest. It was not exactly that he understood the great art of advertising, then in its infancy, or at least in its childhood, but that he was making sure that no man within reaching distance would fail of coming to see his establishment sooner or later. Whether it was in preparation for a parliament or a sociable, there were two short benches and several chairs collected in the neighborhood of the brilliant Franklin; there were also the counters to sit on or lean against. One of the three lamps hung high over the flag-stones in front of the stove, and somebody had brought a newspaper up from one of the river landings. There it was, handy, offering to bring in light from the outer world and provide subjects for conversation for any around-the-fire assembly. Not that then or afterward Abe ever saw there any knot of men who appeared to be short of something to talk about.

That very first evening a pretty full jam of de-

baters were busy with the fall elections which had recently gone by. Abe was a listener. It was all very vague to him, but it had a strange, unexpected fascination, for it was his first lesson in practical politics. He already knew that there were differences among men, that some were Whigs and some were Democrats, but he had no idea how they happened to become so, and he was instantly determined to find out. Both kinds of men were duly represented in the Gentryville parliament, and it appeared to him that they were about evenly divided. As for Mr. Gentry himself, he was an acute mercantile politician—that is, he was a Whig who professed any amount of reverence for General Jackson, and was ready to sell goods to any other man who admired either Old Hickory or Henry Clay, if the proposed customer could show a fair prospect of eventually paying for the goods. Since nearly all sales were made on the credit system, it was well to be watchful in that particular.

When the session adjourned, it was too late for any man who did not have a traveled road to go home by, such as would be traceable by good moon-

light. A man from a greater distance, or with his way to pick through the woods, might do better by remaining in the village all night. The presence of a nearly full moon and a clear sky, indeed, accounted in part for the number of outsiders who were in Gentryville after six o'clock. Not one of them had gone without supper, for Josiah Crawford's place had almost risen to the dignity of a four-corners tavern, such as every self-respecting village ought to have. He was on hand, and Abe said of him:

"He's got the longest, peakedest nose thar is anywhar 'round. He's got loads o' books, though. A feller told me that when he wants to go to sleep he sets at work to read one on 'em."

Mr. Crawford's collection of books was what his neighbors called his library, and it was extraordinary. On a close count, there may have been forty of them, including some which were badly dog's-eared, and others from which the bindings had departed or remained only in the shape of loose outer clothing for the wisdom they wrapped around. The nearness of such literary treasures, however,

was quite enough to set new lines of thought in motion in the mind of the young dry-goods clerk.

On the following evening the moon was one shade nearer full, the sky was yet clearer, and there was even a better attendance by the members of the parliament. Abe had elected himself a kind of sergeant-at-arms, or it might be a reporter. The fire burned brightly, almost extinguishing the fainter illumination from the lamp that swung overhead. The benches and chairs were all occupied. The one defect in the striking picture that was making arose from the fact that there was but one newspaper among them all. It was in the hands of its owner, an entire stranger from nobody knew where, who proposed to spend the night at Josiah Crawford's. He was a short, thick-set man, with red hair and a shrill, exasperating voice. When Abe came back from giving a feed of corn to one of Mr. Gentry's horses at the barn, this man was reading aloud an editorial from his newspaper, like a liberal soul who was willing to give others a share. Abe put a stick of wood on the fire and went and sat on a barrel, but the stick of wood and the sparks and smoke it

brought out into the assembly caused an interruption of the reading. Into this opportunity old man Sansom suddenly plunged with power and vehemence.

"The feller that writ that," he exclaimed, "is a wooden-headed fool! Any man that's lived in the South, as I have, knows that niggers is made to be owned by somebody. They ain't fit for anythin' else. I'm down on free niggers. We don't want any on 'em 'round here. Why, I got out o' Kentucky mostly to git away from 'em."

The stranger coughed loudly, as if he were getting ready to reply, but several voices remarked "Jest so!" one after the other, and old man Sansom actually let his pipe go out as he continued:

"You see, Mister, wharever thar's free niggers it ain't no place for poor white men, onless they're willin' to be counted no better'n a nigger. If you want to live 'mong 'em you must own 'em."

Low growls and other forms of assent came from all sides, and the stranger read something more from his newspaper before he said emphatically:

"Fellow citizens, I am in agreement with you. This is a great country. It is a land of freedom. Our forefathers fought, bled, and died for it. I could wish that every one of you might do the same. But there is an awful question staring us in the face. The black people are increasing rapidly. What are we to do when there comes to be more of them than we can sell? I ask you, will it not then be necessary for us to set them free and make them support themselves?"

It was quickly evident to Abe that here was a political question with which neither Josiah Crawford, nor old man Sansom, nor Mr. Gentry himself, had ever before been called upon to grapple.

"If he isn't puttin' ashes into his pipe instead o' tobacco!" he said to himself. "And old Si Crawford's lettin' the toe of his boot burn."

Neither of them was to be the next speaker, however, for young Bob Sansom broke into the debate energetically:

"Wal, I don't care so much about the niggers as I do 'bout Injins. Jest look over your paper an' see'f thar's any news consarnin' them. We heard

tell, not long ago, that some o' the tribes o' the Northwest was takin' up the hatchet. They wouldn't make treaties for thar lands, to have 'em settled onto by the whites. Let's know'f thar's anythin' doin'."

"Our national dealings with the red men," responded the reader, "open up another of the great questions with which we are face to face. We must determine what we are to do with them. Our great and glorious country has grown up to what it is now by a steady process of removing the aborigines westward, and turning the untrodden forests into farm-lands and towns and cities and villages."

"Wrong thar!" roared old man Sansom. "I reckon the most on 'em wasn't jest moved off the land. They was largely put under it, an' some on 'em wasn't even kivered up. Fact is, I don't jest now remember any time when thar wasn't more or less trouble with the redskins. They never can see the right side of a treaty, an' so they go to takin' skelps."

"Wal," remarked Josiah Crawford, as he with-

drew his burnt boot-toe from its advanced position on the hearth, "thar was a feller here, not long ago, that said we were to have another war with England pretty soon. Is thar anythin' in the paper about it? I'd like to know. It'd raise the price o' pork, an' some chaps that haven't anythin' else to do might sojer it."

"Our relations with the mother country," replied the eloquent stranger, "have always been a subject for deep solicitude. They always will be, until republicanism takes the place of monarchy among the worn-out and worm-eaten oligarchies of the Old World. The great difficulty with England is her persistent refusal to comprehend the true nature of our institutions. I do not think there is any probability of a war at present. We must raise the tariff to a revenue producing——"

He might as well have set some of the dry-goods on fire as to have mentioned that dangerous question in that parliament. Every man there had views of his own. Several of them were strong supporters of Andrew Jackson and the battle of New Orleans, and the destruction of the United States Bank as

an overshadowing, tyrannical money-power. They said so.

"It was tigerishly grasping at the bowels of the commonwealth!" declared the stranger; but the bung was out of the barrel of debate, and for a good two hours there were negroes, Indians, British, tariffs for revenue and tariffs for protection, mingled with the smoke from the Franklin and the tobacco pipes in a way which appeared to Abe to have let him right into the middle of the politics of his country. It was true that he gathered only indistinct ideas here and there, but he did gather them. It was a good beginning, and he might look forward to all the evenings of that winter for additional lessons of all sorts. It was something which could not have come to him in front of the fireplace of his own log-house home.

Shutting-up time came at last, and the debaters arose one by one, with a feeling that they had all passed a delightful evening. They would be sure to come again, and Mr. Gentry was entirely repaid for the cost of his lamp and his fire. He had even sold things to some of the debaters which they had not

thought of buying when they entered the store in the early part of the evening.

It might have seemed, at first, that Abe had really gained very little from his first political debate, however carefully he had listened; but when he was sweeping out the store next morning, in came Mr. Josiah Crawford to get a pipe which he had left behind him.

"Mr. Crawford," said Abe, as he handed him the pipe, "what was it that man said about our Revolution an' 'bout our havin' been slaves to old King George? I don't know."

"Of course you don't," said Mr. Crawford, who seemed to be in a disturbed state of mind. "Tell you what: I'll lend you a book that'll tell you heaps o' things. You must read the Life of George Washington, the Father of his Country, by Weems. Come over and get it by and by. It is one of the greatest books that was ever written. I've read it myself."

"Reckon I'd like to," said Abe. "I'll take good care of it. I'll be ever so much obliged."

"An' you can do chores for me now and then,"

said Mr. Crawford; "and perhaps I'll let you look at some other books. That thar chap that put up at our house last night was a leetle too tonguey for me. He lit out at daylight this mornin' without payin' a cent for his keep. I want to see old man Sansom an' tell him to count his hosses kind o' keerful for a day or two. The critter that stranger rid wasn't wuth the powder an' lead to shoot him. He might like to trade with somebody."

"He couldn't make much out of old man Sansom on a hoss trade!" Abe asserted confidently, but he was only half right.

Before nightfall Mr. Sansom was in the store, sonorously complaining that one of his best five-year-olds was missing, and that in its place had been left the sorry nag which had been ridden by the eloquent stranger who had read the newspaper for the parliament.

CHAPTER XIII

STUMP SPEAKING

THE sessions of the Gentryville parliament were brought to an end at last by the arrival of spring and plowing-time and the consequent dying out of the fire in the Franklin stove. Another important change of life came to Abe, for just as the month of May grew warm enough for corn-dropping, a son of Mr. Gentry's returned from boarding-school to take his place in the store. Abe had to go home, and there were some reasons why he was not sorry for it. He had not been having an easy time, by any means, and his opportunities for making use of Josiah Crawford's library had not been as good as he had wished. His business-like employer had even forbidden him to consume store-time upon literature, and the immortal volume of Weems, the biographer of the Father of his Country, had been but

skimmed, and not committed to memory as it should have been.

"He has been a very industrious little fellow," said Mr. Gentry to Mrs. Lincoln, "and I trust that he has learned things which will be of great value to him in his future career."

"He'll learn all thar is to get hold on," she said. "Trust him for that."

"Well, Mrs. Lincoln, I can tell you one thing about him," laughed Mr. Gentry. "I've watched him. In the course of the winter about everybody has been here. One way or another, Abe saw them all, and he knows the name of every man, woman, and child in all this region. He can tell you all about them, too. He knows what their religion is, if they have any, and whether they are Whigs or Democrats."

"That's Abe!" she exclaimed. "I always took note o' that. He sees all that goes by him, an' he can tell you what it's good for, whether it's a critter or a human. I never saw such a boy for pickin' up things."

Nevertheless, Abe felt a little queer when he

found himself once more following the furrows and dropping corn. It was humdrum work compared to the laziest days he had known at the store. It would have been worse, if he had not now obtained a great deal more time for reading. He finished Weems's Washington, but he somehow neglected to carry it home, and it lay on a rude shelf which had been stuck against the logs near one of the windows, even after other books had come and gone.

Corn-planting was nearly over when Mr. Crawford sent for him to work for three days in his own field. He rewarded him with the loan of a really wonderful book. It was written by an Englishman named Defoe. It told of the adventures of a common sailor fellow named Crusoe, who was wrecked at sea and cast away upon an uninhabited island. There and elsewhere he had a number of remarkable experiences with cats and goats and parrots and wild cannibals and lions and shipwrecked people. Abe could have read that book all through the summer and fall and winter if it had not been a pretty good-looking one, which Mr. Crawford insisted upon getting back. He got more work out of Abe,

however, and lent him a small volume called The Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan. There was a great deal of religion in it, and Abe as yet knew very little about religion. It was time he did, and the book was the right thing for him; but besides the good teaching there were fights of all sorts, and stories of castles and giants and devils, and a long exploring expedition into a new country. After that was read, and before the end of the next winter, he would have been puzzled to say which of two books he enjoyed the most, Æsop's Fables, or the History of the United States. Some of the stories in the former were equal to the yarns of old man Sansom. As for the history, it carried the new nation onward only as far as the battle of New Orleans and the close of the War of 1812. The account that it gave of the great victory did not entirely agree with the one he had received from Sansom, and he asked the old soldier about it. He even carried the book all the way over to his house and read it to him one afternoon. Sansom listened to the end of it, all the while smoking terrifically, and then he dropped his pipe.

"Abe Linkin," he shouted, "the feller that writ that is a liar! He wasn't thar, an' I was. 'Cordin' to him, Gineral Jackson did all the fightin' himself. What'd he ha' done without his army? It's kind o' right thar, though, for the army wouldn't ha' been thar if it hadn't been for the Gineral; he raised 'em an' fetched 'em on. But the feller has missed it 'bout a good many other things. He hasn't said a word 'bout the Barrataria pirates that worked our cannon, nor 'bout the Injins that was with the British an' with us. They all ought to be put in. Tell ye what, though, you mustn't read too many books; it'll spile ye for work."

It had not done so as yet, anyhow, and he was shooting up taller and stronger all the while, so that more work might be put upon him. He was ready for anything, too, and many of the settlers whose acquaintance he had made when he was a merchant in Gentryville had fallen into a way of sending for him to come and work for them a few days at a time. He was always glad to do so, for the Lincoln cabin was somewhat crowded, and three growing boys were more than steady employment could be found

for at home. Money wages were generally out of the question, but there were odds and ends of clothing to be earned, and bits of neighborly accommodation which were transformed into earnings one way or another.

It was during that next winter when Abe was creeping on toward his fifteenth birthday, that he began to think more deeply than ever upon the subject of lamps and candles. Mrs. Lincoln had procured a lamp, and she had candles also, but their employment was one of the exceptional extravagances, and they were not on duty every evening. They were as entirely shut out from Abe's ordinary calculations as were paper, pens, and ink. He had long ago discovered, however, that splits of hickory bark would give a sufficient illumination for the pages of any volume that he could borrow. It had been almost altogether by their aid that he had advanced thus far into the library of Josiah Crawford, but he had employed sunshine whenever that excellent substitute for hickory bark was available.

Evening light was all the more important, because during two whole winters the Pigeon Creek

school had been taught by another Crawford, named Andrew, and he had been led to take especial interest in his young pupil both as to scholarship and good manners. All the while, however, Josiah had managed to get a great deal out of Abe in return for his books, and one of the transactions had not been profitable to the reader. It was true that it made him the owner of a book, or what was left of it, but he paid dearly for the biography of George Washington. It had been put with all care upon its shelf near the window, but less attention had been given to the clay with which the interstices of the logs over that shelf had been "chinked." Just one more ventilation in the wall of a log house was not a matter which called for speedy action, but one night there came a driving rain-storm, and its wind hurled it upon that side of the cabin. No other harm was done, but in the morning it was discovered that George Washington had been soaked through and through. The remaining beauty of its cover was gone. Even after much drying, the leaves refused to turn in their old way, and some of them would never again be readable. It was a disaster which

had to be reported to Mr. Josiah Crawford at once, and his face grew long and stern while he listened.

"Abe," he said, "that's a hard thing to bear. I set great store by that book. It isn't easy to git 'em; they're scurse. I'm awful sorry, but I'll tell you what I'll do: You keep it an' call it your own, an' you come over an' pull corn fodder for the vally on it. My corn's jest ready for you."

Abe consented, of course, but he did so with but a faint idea of the price of soaked books, when they are to be paid for in the work of a boy in a corn-field. It would have made him much older if he had gone on buying the Crawford library at that rate, and he shortly lost a great deal of his previous esteem for the librarian.

Abe's next important problem related to writing-paper, and he won a victory over it which did him credit. The solution consisted mainly of shingles and a draw-knife from his father's kit of carpenter tools. He made the face of a shingle as smooth as that of a sheet of paper, and upon it he wrote figures or letters to his heart's content, with a crayon of black charcoal from the fireplace. The

great wooden shovel that stood at the side of the fire answered as well, and either shovel or shingle might be put in order for further business with the draw-knife.

Smooth wood can hardly be described as a stepping-stone, but it was so for Abe. The day of better appliances came. Among the later mercantile adventures of Mr. Gentry was a lot of cheap blank-books, and he could not easily have explained why he had thought of selling them to his usual customers. They did not sell at all, and shortly he was ready to close a bargain with Abe for one of them. Ink and steel pens were in the bargain, and from that time onward the young student was in an upper class of his own frontier academy. Anything in the nature of original composition was to be written upon shaven wood first, for economy, and then if it were worthy of preservation it was transferred to the pages of the copy-book. These, however, were usually reserved for extracts from books. Passages which were especially valuable or pleasing could not be entrusted entirely to memory, but had to be kept for reference after the necessary return of the bor-

rowed volume. Here and there Abe also began to stumble upon poems of various kinds, and there were many of these in his mother's hymn-book. With these in his head as well as on his paper, he shortly discovered how words might be made to jingle, or rather to rattle, and he began to make rhymes of his own which went into the blank-book as original poetry.

The wisdom of legislators in Indiana and elsewhere pushed all the fall elections on into November, that politics should not be interfered with by the corn harvests. All the settlers were therefore free at such times to take an interest in public affairs, and were sure to avail themselves of their privileges. In each successive election season there were gatherings at central points to listen to the eloquence of stump orators, generally from a distance and supposed to be great. Men of both parties were sure to turn out at these political musters. Not only were such occasions sociable holidays, but it was dealing fairly by any speaker to come out and hear what he had to say for himself. Old and young attended, while the women brought their knitting

and their babies as if they were expecting to vote at the November polls. In all this electioneering and oratory and discussion there was an important consequence to Abe. Every speech that he listened to was like a new settler come to preempt something or other that was in him. Thought after thought, idea after idea, not only came to stay, but began before long to arouse his power of imitation. He was just as well satisfied, however, that at first it was not necessary for him to procure audiences. These were things of the future. They might even have been embarrassing, as audiences often are to older speakers, and for the present a vacant lot would do as well.

"Tom," said Mrs. Lincoln to her husband one afternoon, as she stood in the doorway, "do come out here! I heard him, an' I was afraid somethin' 'd happened to him. Jest do look at that boy!"

"The young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Lincoln. "I told him he'd got to come in an' shell corn, an' thar he is, speakin' on that stump!"

"Wal," said Mrs. Lincoln, "I'd heard tell of his cuttin' up in that way before. He was over to the

Whig gatherin' last week. Jedge Hoskins an' all on 'em made speeches. He's makin' another."

That was what he was doing, with only an empty corn-field to hear him, and he was mounted upon one of the largest stumps in that clearing. In a few minutes more he had all the Lincoln family before him, with three or four of their neighbors; but Tom went and pulled him down.

"Look a' here," he said to his lanky son, "do you jest go back to your corn-shellin'; then you an' John can make a trip to the mill. You know more 'bout pone than you do 'bout politics. Don't ye try it on ag'in."

Down came Abe, but he had an unaccountable feeling inside of him that his oration—not his first, by any means—had been a kind of success, and that his father's prohibition applied to only that one occasion. It did not cover the whole of Indiana, nor any of the other States, and there would always be stumps somewhere for a fellow who was ready to mount them.

The political orators were not the only examples which Abe attempted to copy. There were no set-

tled pastors in that neighborhood, but there were ministers who "rode the circuit" and preached as missionaries from place to place. The days of their coming were fixed long beforehand, and it made not a great deal of difference what denomination of Christians any of them nominally belonged to. Among their hearers, if they came within her reach, was sure to be good Mrs. Lincoln, and she was almost as sure to bring with her her husband, and some of the children if possible. Abe was likely to go on his own account, if he could, for a reason of his own. The fact was that a preacher was as interesting to him as any other stump orator, and was as sure to be imitated, and possibly caricatured, at the next opportunity. That might be found in the woods, or in a corn-field, at any time, but something more to his liking was to be had at the house itself on any Sunday absence of his father and mother. If Mrs. Lincoln and her husband went to meeting at a distance which called for the horses, there being no wagon, they did not thereby deprive the young people of a sermon, for Abe could give them one himself. The big table pulled into a corner pro-

vided him with a pulpit, and almost anything he might think of furnished him with a text. Hymn and sermon followed, with attentive listeners, and the young fun-maker did not know that he was in this way developing in himself a great deal of genuine interest in religious matters. At all events, he had been led to read the big Bible through and through, and to pack away in his tenacious memory a vast amount of its contents and teachings.

During those few years the local changes were many, and there was a considerable increase of population. Neighbors were not now so far away as they had been, and Gentryville was really a village. The arrival of the new state of affairs, however, was looked upon with different eyes and feelings by different kinds of people.

"Abe," said old man Sansom one day, as they stood together in front of Jim Allen's blacksmith shop, "times is changin'! Sometimes it 'pears to me like I'd have to pull up an' strike out West."

"I reckon thar isn't much difference 'round here," said Abe, "'cept thar are more farms, an' more folks to go an' see."

"'Tisn't that, Abe," groaned Sansom. "I'm sellin' more hosses than I used to; I'd have somethin' to go with, if I went. But game's gittin' awful scurse, specially turkeys an' b'ar. You have to go farther'n you used to to fetch in a deer. An' thar's another thing I've noted: Jest look at them folks, now, goin' into Gentry's store. 'Tisn't Sunday, nuther. I jest can't stand that riggin'. Tell ye what, Abe, I won't never give up my buckskins, not if every other man I know's wearin' caliker an' leather shoes."

"Wal," said Abe, "nobody wears shoes at home. It's only when they go to the village or to a huskin' or to a house-raisin' or to a dance or to a preachin'. They go barefoot, too, an' only put on thar shoes an' things jest before they git in. But old Gentry's at work on 'em; he stirs 'em up to buy his goods."

"Jest so all 'round the country," said Sansom sadly. "If things go on in this way, I can't stay much longer. I did want neighbors, but I didn't want so many nor so close, nor to have 'em scarin' off the game. I'd go any day if 'twasn't for my boys an' thar wives."

Abe could not altogether sympathize with his discontented friend on the subject of game. He had discovered that he was not a hunter of wild beasts or birds. Of course he could use a rifle, but he was anything other than a sure shot. All his practise shooting had been in a different direction, and it was even beginning to unfit him for the woods. He was less and less like an Indian with every year that went by. There was yet another reason for his liking the changes which were so disagreeable to Sansom. Partly owing to his length, which made him appear older, but much more to the amount of fun that he could make, he had become a welcome guest at all the backwoods merry-makings, and was sure to be in attendance upon any that were near enough, even if he had to borrow a horse to go. On some of these festal occasions, indeed, the demand was for horses and a wagon, that the whole Lincoln family might go together, for the girls of the Pigeon Creek settlement were as ready as the boys to dance all night, whether barefooted or in shoes, if there was light enough to dance by.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RAIL-SPLITTER

ONE more winter went by. Most of it was spent by Abe in doing odd jobs of work for the neighbors, whose clearings, widened by each winter's chopping, were crowding out hunters like old man Sansom. There were deer in plenty, as yet, and turkeys, if one went far enough into the woods, but the cougars had nearly disappeared. As for the bears, their day also was over, and the hollow trees of the southern Indiana forests were likely thenceforth to have no better winter occupants than opossums and raccoons.

It was on a bright sunshiny morning early in the spring, and Abe was once more at old man Sansom's. One of his reasons for being there came out in almost the first words that were spoken to him.

"Abe," said the old man, "I'm gwine. I can't stand this sort o' thing no longer. The boys an'

gals are to keep this place, but I'm off for Illinoy. Mebbe they'll foller me."

"What sort o' country's that?" asked Abe.

"All nat'ral medder," replied Sansom. "I've never seen a real big prairie in my life, but I've heard tell. No woods onto it. You can make a farm without choppin'. Good land, too."

"What'll you do for a house?" asked Abe.

"Thar's timber enough for that, an' for fencin', all along the creeks," he said, "an' your farm can reach out into the open. Thar's loads o' game, specially prairie chickens an' wolves, but the buffler has mostly gone West. Shows thar good sense. I'd quit, if I was them! Now tell me, what are ye gwine to do with yerself?"

"Reckon it's done," said Abe. "I heard you were goin', an' I came over to say good-by. You see, I'm not to stay much more at our house. I'm to git out an' earn my own livin'."

"Whar can you do that?" inquired his friend.

"Why," said Abe, "mother's fixed it with Mr. Jim Taylor, at the mouth of Anderson's Creek, on the river. I'm to put in this year with him. Six

dollars a month, an' father gits the money, but it keeps me."

"Wal," responded Sansom thoughtfully, "you're kind o' young to go out into the world in that way. He owns the ferry, an' I s'pose you'll have to row boats an' do all sorts o' things. Part of every day you'll be in Injiany, an' the other part over in Kentucky. 'Tisn't every man that can live in two States at once. I knowed a man once that lived in three without ever movin' off his own farm. He owned an island in the Mississippi, down at the lower p'int o' Tennessee. The river channel ran west of his place, an' the middle of it was the boundary 'twixt Tennessee an' Arkansaw. All the while the river was wearin' away the upper end of his island, but at the same time it was settlin' acres an' acres o' sand on its lower end an' makin' it bigger'n 'twas before, givin' him land for nothin'. Then kem a great fresh, a flood, that changed the channel, an' the State line with it, for the river then ran on his east side, an' he an' his farm were over in Arkansaw. Then a surveyor was runnin' State lines, an' he found the whole island had been drifted

down-stream below the Tennessee line; and another big fresh put back the channel to its old runnin', an' thar was that thar plantashin h'isted along into the State of Mississippi. Anyhow, you'll belong to the State you sleep in, an' you'll soon find out whar that is if you don't git yourself drowned in the Ohio, or floated off down-stream to New Orleans! I wish you may have a good time; but, bless my soul, Abe, how you are growin'!"

The talk was a long one, for Sansom had a number of stories to tell concerning river life, prairie life, the things which had been and the things which he had seen here and there. Abe was really sorry to say what might be an everlasting good-by to him, but he went home at last with a number of fresh ideas of the new career which was opening before him.

"Oh, Abe, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Lincoln, as the family sat in front of the smoldering fire that evening, "it 'pears to me like you were gwine away a thousand mile! We shall see you once in a while, too, but it's awful to have you away from us the best part of a whole year."

"That's so, Sally," said Mr. Lincoln thoughtfully, "an' jest what sorts he'll be cuttin' up, I don't know."

There was something to be considered in that, and it appeared as if all the rest of the family were disposed to put in a joint assent in one form or another. The fact was that every one there was becoming aware that an important part of the life of that household was now to be taken out of it. It was a curiously effective way of making the young story-teller and fun-maker better appreciated at home. He was made to feel that he would be missed exceedingly, and he did not know exactly what to say about it.

"You'll see all sorts o' folks," remarked Mrs. Lincoln, "an' some on 'em you won't know at all what to do with. Jim Taylor himself is a hard kind o' man, an' it won't be easy to deal with him. But I tell you what, I saw one thing while I was thar that I reckon you'll like."

"What's that, mother?" asked Abe.

"Wal," she replied, "he told me 'bout it himself. He'd never ha' bought so many books on his

own 'count, but there was a kind o' doctor feller that got to owin' him a pile o' money, an' he took them books of him on the debt. Thar are dozens on 'em, an' some are in prime new bindin's—look as if no soul'd ever opened 'em. You may git at 'em, somehow."

"Reckon I will!" exclaimed Abe. "But it doesn't do a book any harm to have it read. Readin' a book doesn't wear it out. Rats will, though. Old man Crawford lost some of his'n that way. An' what kind o' good any rat can git out of a book I don't know."

She was able to tell him a great deal about the people and things at and about the mouth of Anderson's Creek and the landing. There were trading-houses there and a tavern, or a house which had almost grown to the size and dignity of a tavern, and it was vaguely reported to be a great center and stopping-place for horse-thieves. The reason for this was, she said, that when once a stolen beast could be ferried across from one State into the other it was almost of no use to follow him.

"Old man Sansom told me about that," said

'Abe. "He said he knew a man once that kept a ferry of his own jest for the good it was in takin' stolen critters across the river at night. But he was caught out at it, at last, an' some fellers that'd had horses ferried over put a stone at his neck an' hove him into the river. Old man Sansom said he never met him ag'in anywhar after that."

"He's gwine away, too," she said. "Wal, the times are changin'. Let's go to bed, an' your father'll take you over in the wagon in the mornin'."

Abe did sleep that night, but he was out of the house early the next morning, and it appeared to do him good to get the chores half done before the other boys were down out of the garret. Then they took all that was left away from him, as if he were interfering with affairs which were no longer under his management. After that he was an exceedingly quiet fellow for hours, until his father landed him at the mouth of Anderson's Creek. Here his first discovery was that to Mr. Taylor and his neighbors, and the Ohio River itself, the arrival of one more very young farm and ferry hand was of no consequence whatever. His father went home, and then

there was no more excitement, except in his own mind, than if a young muskrat had swum ashore at the landing. Abe himself soon became cool and calm externally, but he was at once a busy boy. It was evident that his employer expected a great deal from him for six dollars a month, and he set him to earning his wages in a decidedly peremptory manner.

Abe was ready for work. He had counted upon it, but with it now came to him a very necessary process of exploration. There would be no rest for him until he should become entirely familiar with his new surroundings.

Among the first things to be inspected, as soon as an opportunity could be had, were the boats. There were several at the landing, belonging to one person or another, but his interests centered upon those which were the property of Mr. Taylor. He had two, and both of them were scows with snub noses. One was designed for only two oars, or four at the most, and Abe felt sure that he would soon be able to manage it with any ordinary cargo. At the same time, it was evident that no stolen horse would

ever cross the Ohio in that concern, unless he might be persuaded to swim ahead and tow the boat. The larger ferry-boat was really large, and required a crew of three or four strong men, for it would every now and then be laden with a wagon and its team. As to any difficulties in ferrying, they would always depend upon the condition of the river. During flood times, of which there were sure to be several every year, the narrow and shallow Ohio of the dry seasons became a rushing and mighty torrent, like a great people aroused by a great wrath. Then only strong arms and courage and skilful piloting could take a boat safely over. It was not to be forgotten in flood-time that there might be danger also from drifting tree-trunks or floating ice-floes. Collisions with these might wreck any kind of craft, whether a ferry-boat or a State or a nation.

"Why, Abe," Sansom had once told him, "I've seen the Ohio boomin' up all over the bank an' 'round the houses at the landin'. You can't bet on what a river won't do when it's up. I was down the Mississippi once in a great fresh. Thar was what they call a Red Rise kem down from the west moun-

tains. It ran through that kind o' mud, you know, an' it was red as blood. The big flatboat I was on was clean out o' sight o' land at the mouth o' the Arkansaw River, an' we went on down to Orleens a kitin'. Tell ye what, Abe, but wasn't I glad when we took Orleens!"

A day or so after his arrival, and at a short distance down the river bank, Abe saw a new flatboat in course of construction. He studied it from end to end, and determined that some day or other he would get himself employed on a boat as large as that, or larger. Then, he thought, he and the men who would be with him would float on and on with the current until they were carried out into the great Mississippi. This would bear them southward, day after day, night after night, week after week, through new scenes all the while, until at last his boat should be hauled up and hitched at the right place. He thought that then he would manage somehow to go on a little farther and have a long look at the deep sea—at the wonderful, deep blue sea, with its beauty and its eternal mystery.

It was hard work to please Mr. Taylor, and Abe

had anything but an easy time of it. All kinds of farm work and chores and errands fell to his share, and with them an unreasonable amount of fault-finding. He soon learned that not even the most faithful, painstaking performance of duties could save a fellow from sharp and unjust criticism. He toiled on, however, through heat and cold, good words and bad words, and before long he made himself an expert boatman. He had not much to do as yet with the management of the great ferry-boat. That would surely come to him later, and not at so very long a time, considering how fast he was growing and what an extraordinary degree of strength he was developing.

Abe had a great deal of ferrying to do, nevertheless, although it was confined to the scow, which he could handle, and he had a large number and variety of passengers from time to time. He noticed that the men who crossed the Ohio in his care had but little or nothing to say to him, as a rule, but that every woman who entered that boat, without one solitary exception, inquired whether or not he had ever been upset. Most of them wished also to know

how many persons had ever been drowned at that ferry.

As to the fact that the men passengers did not talk with a mere ferry-boy, there was one remarkable exception to the rule. It came toward the autumn, when a great and entirely unexpected flood had been caused by rain-storms in the Allegheny Mountains, far away, in which the river takes its rise. It was not at all necessary that there should also be a great rain at the mouth of Anderson's Creek.

The Ohio became very wide, muddy, angry, and swept down with a swift rush, on the bosom of which were carried all sorts of things, including some log cabins, two or three frame houses, and the bodies of drowned cattle and sheep and horses. Abe stared long and anxiously at the wild water, to know if there were also any bodies of men or women or children, but he did not see any. While he was looking at the flood and listening to its roar, he heard the voice of Mr. Taylor calling out:

"Abe Lincoln, get the boat ready! You've got to take this man over."

"All right!" shouted Abe, and he sprang away after his oars.

In a few minutes more he was in the boat and away from the landing, while on the stern seat sat the solitary passenger, who had refused to wait in Indiana until that flood should go down. He was an elderly man, tall and thin, with a wrinkled, closely shaven face, and remarkably good clothing. All the baggage he had with him was a small portmanteau. Abe decided not to ask him if he were able to swim. The scow at first had its broadside to the current, and this was sweeping it down-stream rapidly, when the old gentleman quietly commanded:

"Head her up-stream, young man. If you don't, at this rate we shall get out into the Mississippi. I wish to land in Kentucky."

"Thar it is, yonder," replied Abe. "We'll git thar safe enough, onless they move the old State while we're crossin'."

"States can't be moved from where they are now," said the stranger. "You are pulling very well. There! you are headed right now. Never

take the pains to run over a drowned horse; that one has gone by. I'll keep a lookout and tell you when another is coming."

Abe pulled his best, but before he knew it he was answering all sorts of quietly put questions, and every now and then the old gentleman would wrinkle his high, white forehead and grumble, "Good for him!"

It was a long, exceedingly fatiguing passage, but the Kentucky landing was reached, and the passenger and crew of the ferry-scow stepped on shore.

"Abe," said the former, handing him a silver dollar, "take that for yourself; I have paid Mr. Taylor. Now, I'll tell you just one thing for you to remember: You are fit for something better than rowing a scow. God has put a great deal of brains into your head; you must learn to use them. It is remarkable that you have already read so many books, away out here in the wilderness. Go on! Read! read! read! Make the most of yourself. Be a man! This country of ours is dreadfully short of men. Good-by."

He was gone, baggage and all, and Abe stood still, looking after him.

"I didn't even git his name," he said to himself. "I'm glad the old scow didn't upset with him. Thar's a good deal of him. I never had jest sech a feller in this boat before. Go on? I'll do it. Yes, that's what I'll do. I'll make the most of myself!"

Year after year the Ohio swept on, on, on, at flood-time or low water. Very many were the flat-boats which were built and went with their cargoes down the Father of Waters, never to come back again. On one of them Abe himself made the trip to New Orleans which he had hoped for, and he saw whatever there was to be seen, going or coming.

Away westward, beyond the great river, during all this time, the prairie country into which old man Sansom fled from the too thickly settled forests of Southern Indiana, became itself thickly settled. On its broad surface were countless farms, hundreds of hamlets, towns, cities, full of wonderful things which had not been so much as dreamed of in that

earlier day. It was in one of the larger towns of this Illinois prairie, in the spring of the year 1860, and in an immense temporary hall called a "Wigwam," that a vast throng of excited citizens was assembled. On the side of the wigwam opposite its main entrance was an elevated platform. It had many occupants, but the most conspicuous of them all was a tall, dignified man, who arose and stepped forward just as the great door was thrown open to admit some important arrival. He stood in silence and looked earnestly in that direction, while a short, sturdy man walked slowly forward with a burden on his shoulders. His load consisted of a pair of fence rails, and from them arose a banner with an inscription which might be read by all:

TWO RAILS
MADE BY ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND JOHN HANKS
IN THE SANGAMON BOTTOM
IN THE YEAR 1830.

The crowd arose to its feet and cheered vociferously during several minutes. Then the tall

man on the platform was silent a moment before he said:

"Gentlemen, I suppose you want to know something about those things. Well, the truth is, John Hanks and I did make rails in the Sangamon bottom. I don't know whether we made those rails or not. The fact is, I don't think they are a credit to the makers. But I do know this: I made rails then, and I think I could make better ones than those now."

Once more the wigwam rang with cheering and with laughter, and then a something of solemnity followed, as if serious business were on hand. It was indeed a serious and wonderful work that was doing. The "Rail-splitter," the boy from the backwoods, the log cabin, the flatboat, from poverty and ignorance and desolation, was about to be nominated and then elected President of the United States, that he might greatly serve his country in its darkest hour, serving also the whole human race, and serving God. He would do this, and then he would pass on into that deep, far sea which is called ETERNITY, leaving behind him a name and fame

which will but grow brighter as the ages of the earth roll slowly on. He had made of himself the best that he could, and so he had been ready for his work in the day of God's appointing.

THE END